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MARGARET WARRINER



By *ALICE BROWN*

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MARGARET WARREN

BY

ALICE BROWN



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1901

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To F. E. C.

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MARGARET WARRENER

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE AND THE STREET

MERRYMOUNT STREET drops down to the river, across which the twilight flushes and deepens, broken by gas-lamps and the evening star. Traveled persons who come upon the street for the first time are apt to note its likeness to some foreign one; and even the stay-at-home finds in its narrowness and jutting length a mediæval quaintness and an age antedating America. Abruptly as it hurries from top to foot, it is never unrestful, chiefly because the mellow red houses on either side project irregularly, and caress the eye with a pleasing inconsistency. Midway, a lamp stretches from the wall in artful fashion, breaking monotony at one inevitable point; and when the light flares out, it accents the dusk, arrests the eye, and leads it down to the sunset reflected in the blue-black stream. Just below the lamp, the street extends two arms into elm-shaded squares, both grassy, but socially diverse. One is Quincy Square, protected by an iron railing and little gates whereof the abutters only hold the keys; there, middle-aged ladies whose fortunes are fallen, and who board all the year round, come out, in spring twilights, with paisley shawls upon

their shoulders, and linger awhile, in the pious belief that they are according nature all the air and exercise she can with propriety demand. They sit upon benches made of trellis-work, and sigh over the destitution of the vagrant cats in the square, speculating on the moral poverty of those who go away, in summer, and leave them homeless ; or they watch the benevolent brown wings of the Catholic sisterhood, as they flit rapidly past with downcast glances and the air of grace. The sisterhood occupies a great house with a garden where ladies' -delights bloom in untended profusion, holding their own against the sod. The sisters have no time to weed or gather ; but they cast their heart's-ease a thankful look, in passing, and then go on, to spend their own lives in as humble a content.

The old ladies who sit in the square wonder whether the sisters really never talk together, and whether they do much good. It seems to them the nuns are likely to pauperize by this tendance of sick and poor ; but then they suppose, being Romanists, they do it to make converts. The sisters, in return, think very little about the old ladies ; their feet ache too bitterly, and their minds are intent on sores and sprains. But the bell from their hidden chapel in the garden measures rapid hours, and the sweet, thin sound of their chanting illumines all the street : the ladies in the square meanwhile regarding the whole as a pleasant pageantry like the sunset or the mist at dawn. On Sundays and feast days they quite depend on seeing the sisters fluttering, two and two, down the street, to the cathedral across the bridge. It gives them a hint of a world unlike their own ; they have a tremu-

lous sense of living elbow to elbow with Popery, and remaining holily untouched.

The other square, opposite this, like the second arm of a cross, is quite different. As a once haughty region may, in the chances of time, find itself the neighbor of the non-elect, so it has been with Quincy Square. Benedict Square stretches into a tawdry quarter, of old clothes' shops and crazy tenements. It has no railing, its grass is beaten into the ground by the hoofs of the populace, and out of school hours ragged children throng it all day long. In the summer, when squares should be green and smiling, it becomes intolerably parched, a desert under an arid sky.

Merrymount Street was once the residence of the city nobility; but it fell first into the boarding-house stage, and then, by gradual steps, became transformed into apartments. No new and garish enterprise devastated its length. There was no leveling and rebuilding; the queer old houses were painfully converted into flats, and, prices remaining mercifully low, a most excellent and impecunious set of people came to flourish there. By some unspoken consent, painters, musicians, writers drifted into Merrymount Street, because there they could get queer corners cheaply, and left the towering sky-scrapers just outside their borders to the man who wanted modern ugliness and was able to pay. And so it came about that a little colony of people who were able to understand one another's reason for being, though they might not have spoken without falling to fisticuffs, found it pleasant to meet in the morning, and exchange the harmless signal of a glance. One house, just under the flaring gas-lamp, was more battered

than any other, the door from the kicks of late-returning travelers, and the windows from age. Unlike its neighbors, it bore no door-plate with a distinguishing name; but, high up over the door itself, was painted, in very intricate letters, the word BABINE. This was a standing puzzle to new postmen and the strangers idling into the street. It was evidently not meant to be read, nor was it destined to be pronounced.

"What's the meaning of that?" asked the cheerful agent of the janitress, when he came round for the rents in the first month of its being. The janitress was English. Though somewhat ashy and worn, she had seen better days, wherein young gentlemen in chambers played a part. She could understand.

"Indeed, sir," replied she tolerantly, "it was that poor Mr. Ketchum. He came home, a week ago Tuesday, the worse for liquor, and he would have the step-ladder out there, and painted the characters by gas-light. They say he paints very well when he's a little overtaken. Not that this is anything to go by. It's a kind of a club they've got inside here, and now poor Mr. Ketchum has had to leave it, and go on to New York. Only this morning I brought out my brush and pail to scrub it off; but it's all we've got to remember him by — and I hope nobody objects!"

The agent took another look, and tried to spell it out, making the N into U and the I an F. Then, having had his curiosity a little dulled from former acquaintance with the street and its eccentricities, he smiled upon Mrs. Bebington, as if human motives hardly needed explanation to a man of his experience, and went his way. So the name remained, and the club flourished, though Ketchum was removed for evermore.

One night in late November, Llandaff Warrener and his wife, the two newest residents in the house, were idling about their apartment on the second floor. They were waiting for the expected to happen, both in a slight degree of excitement, though an excitement failing to accord. Warrener, a compact man, with full blue eyes and brown hair shading light at the roots, stood by a window, drumming the pane, in a manifest impatience. He had a striking face, strangely blended of the joy of life and its discontent. His firm, round chin, with the deep cleft in it, was that of Hyacinthus; but his brows frowned down upon it in the folds of an imperiousness not altogether noble. The mouth was not firm enough, the nose too thick. It was not a consistent face, but one full of a distinctly magnetic and animal charm.

Margaret, his wife, moved back and forth, touching an article, here and there, with a pretense of putting the room in order. She was a woman to arrest the attention of eyes trained to look for spiritual values. It was her own belief that, in private life, she had no atmosphere, and that the glance would naturally pass her by in search of a beauty more robust. That might be true. She was a thought too pale, but her profile was delicate, breathing pride. Her eyes were gray, her teeth perfection, and she had a way of turning, in sudden interest, and flashing upon you the charm of a rare smile and a darkening iris. You could only catch your breath; cold and pale before, now some indwelling spirit awakened, and the revelation bewildered. Her hair, a dead brown of no unusual sort, though rich in quantity, was brushed loosely back in a careless pompadour, and she wore

plain yet exquisite clothes, Parisian in every curve. She was a woman who had lived with an emotional extravagance, and now looked older than her years. As she watched her husband, fine lines awoke in her face and deepened with the moment's thought. Warrenner took out his watch, though a city clock was striking. He could not listen.

"What time did she say?" he asked, without turning.

Margaret made a quick movement of the hands: a fluttering index of her thought.

"Who?" she said perversely.

"Laura. What time was she to come?"

"Between eleven and twelve." She answered with a careful patience, yet a note of protest beat unsummoned in her voice. Her husband turned again to the window, and Margaret, moving nearer, somewhat timidly placed a hand upon his arm.

"Llandaff!"

"Well?"

"Why do we wait?"

"You need n't," he answered kindly. "I shall. I want to hear the latest from the 'Householder.'"

"What is there to hear?"

"You know. You know perfectly well." He spoke with the impatience born of a mind preoccupied. "It's the new paper started by the 'Telephone' people, chiefly for country circulation. I don't know half their plans: big advertising, prizes, that sort of thing. Laura has the domestic page, and she's working the crowd for me. It's mighty good of her — mighty good. There!"

A herdic crawled laboriously up the street; now it

halted. Warrener ran down the stairs, and, returning in a moment, handed into the room with an exaggerated courtesy, a tall woman wrapped in an Irish cloak of dull old blue. She put down a shapeless sort of bag, stuffed with manuscript, and seated herself on the sofa beside it.

“Ods herdics and cabs!” she remarked, throwing back the cloak, to disclose a rumpled green silk disfigured by long-suffering lace. And then again, “Ods herdics and cabs!” She was Laura Neale, journalist. The two stood there looking at her, and both, in different ways, wondered at her ugliness and at her power. She was a dull-colored woman with pale complexion and a quantity of ash-blond hair tossed over her head in the admired disorder so likely to be art. Her eyes were blue, her lashes light, and she was built on a generous model with no superfluous ounce of flesh. Her shoulders were magnificent, her waist unrestrained, her length of leg divine. Her face, dun as its color was, held something intangibly compelling. They still stood regarding her, and she put both large hands to her hair and patted it into shape, not with feminine touches but an accurate firmness. The green sleeves fell away, disclosing the whiteness of her full, round arm. She had forgotten them, but suddenly she recalled herself, and broke into a laugh.

“Well?” she queried. “Well, Margaret, what do you think of me?”

Margaret’s scrutiny had been a breathless one, the fruit of inner speculation. Her thoughts were not such as courted the day, and, reddening, she drew back.

"Let me take your cloak," said she. "You must be hungry. Shall we have the rarebit here? The cheese is in your room, but Llandaff could get it."

Laura vouchsafed a frank yawn, and her glance went elsewhere. "Oh, no!" she said, "no. It's easier to do it there. Llandaff, run ahead and light the gas. Come, Margaret."

Warrener obeyed with that air of extravagant interest which had marked his watching from the window; he seemed like a child sent on some new quest, and infinitely capable of being fascinated by little things. Laura followed slowly, and Margaret remained behind, staring at them and the open door through which they went. Then she recalled herself from an evident pre-occupation, and took her way upstairs.

Laura's apartment bore no likeness to this, its more pretentious neighbor. The Warreners had been living abroad, and they had brought home with them so many products of an old-world art and industry that the rooms seemed overflowing with careless ornament. Laura's rooms were bare, and their size thereby enhanced. She had plain shades at the windows without beguiling draperies, and her floors were brown and very dusty. But everywhere one could read the consideration of rest and comfort. She had two broad couches, and a great table five feet long, littered with papers; an old-fashioned dresser held beer-mugs and a droll combination of dishes, from rarebit plates to saucepans. It was like a man's room. She lived and worked, and that you saw in her surroundings. By the time Margaret got up there, Laura was at a side-table, deftly stirring her rarebit, and Llandaff moved about in a pleased excite-



ment, getting plates and beer. Laura looked very large and tall at her work, and the green dress fell about her in crumpled yet ever-pleasing folds. She looked a goddess dressed like a slattern. Seeing her once, you would turn back to gaze again. An air of power pervaded her, a suggestion of the things of earth, together with a most piquing carelessness as to whether she might please.

"Where's Chatterton?" she called, tossing in the pepper. "If he's up, he should be here. He'll swear he has n't eaten since yesterday."

Llandaff ran up the stairs, and stood knocking at an attic door.

"I don't really believe he sleeps all day," said Margaret, who had drawn near the cooking-table.

"No, nor I; but he lies in bed, — lies there and nibbles crackers. And when Beb goes up to do the room, he throws boots. Then at five, six perhaps, never earlier than five, he gets up, forages the town for chops, and standees at the play. A merry life has Chattie."

"Not there!" reported Warrener, from the doorway.

"Ah, it's a first night. I'd forgotten. But here's the Chancellor. *Wie gehts*, Channie?"

"Where hast thou been, sister?" echoed a voice from the sill. It was deep, smooth, and very sad. But the man's look belied it, unless, indeed, you could get behind his spectacles. He was of medium height, of middle age, and rather heavy. His pale face was whitened further by a short black beard, and his dark eyes seemed rather small, chiefly because they were so deeply set. They were the telltale feature of his

face, but no one, since his youth, had found three-quarters of a chance for reading them. He was Bayard Brandon, also journalist, and reported very clever, unapproachable, and exceedingly drastic in his comments on men and things. Laura met his look with one of cool, frank comradeship. Like the glances between man and man, it neither challenged nor denied.

"*Not* 'killing swine.' Would I had ; but they 're all alive, their tales behind them. Come in, Channie. There's cakes and ale."

He dropped his hat in a chair by the door, and with a marked deference bowed to Mrs. Warrener. "You," said his glance, "are a woman and my superior." He passed a hand wearily over his forehead, and seemed to smooth out the things he thought in favor of such as might be brought to the surface. "Theatre?" he asked, indicating Laura.

"No; nothing so blest. Ladies' Country Club reception. President, Mrs. Frye, pressed some money into my hand. 'Now give us a good notice!' said she, cooing. I opened my hand and let the bill flutter. She picked it up. She bungled, and I saw the figure. Channie, I ne'er shall look upon its like again, in the way of bribery."

Brandon's eyes glowed retrospectively. His mouth yielded to a bitter curve as swift as the thought behind it and as swiftly swept away. "Would it had been I," he muttered, "and another man. I could have returned on my shield."

"Don't worry. Some of us don't need fists. Ten women saw her — proper ones — and my lady won't be elected another year. There, children, take your places. Scramble! I've caught my hare."



She dipped the rarebit dextrously, and Warrener, who had been serving beer, handed about the plates. They sat down with the air of knowing certain desirable spots for resting a mug. Laura curled up on a couch, and held her plate in her lap, snugly, as if she loved it. Margaret drew a chair to a corner of the table, pushing back a pile of proof, and Llandaff took a little cricket near the couch. Brandon moved about ruminatingly, eating as he went and returning to his mug on the mantel as to a spring. He was too tired to sit. Then when the first pangs were over, Laura said, —

“I had some excellent fooling. The Oil and Water has an exhibition, and their catalogue was printed in bedlam. A little waterfall — I misdoubt me they’ve hung it upside down; but that’s no matter — was ‘Madame Pompadour.’ I found a very involved joke in that. You won’t. It’s too early to-morrow morning. Mrs. Bailey Meadows, paint, powder, false front, figured under ‘The Rule of Three It Puzzles Me.’ ”

Brandon broke into a sudden guffaw. Margaret looked inquiry.

“A chicken of sixty,” said Laura, answering the glance. “Always evading the tariff. Giles Maxwell (an old buck, Margaret, who devastated society fifty years ago and now the horror of girls whose mammas make them dance with him), he was ‘Requiescat.’ ”

“You’re making up now,” said Brandon, incidentally.

“I don’t know whether I am or not,” returned Laura, with indifference. “Truth runs imperceptibly into romance: like the primary colors. But

one thing let me tell you: I made two splendid hits to-day, both by sheer luck. Evelina Bell has come to town. She is the present 'George Eliot of America.' I had ten minutes for an interview. Found her looking the part: decent black silk, pearl pin, and agitated recognition of her own laurels. It would n't do to let her talk; there was n't time. I had her give me a fact or two. (No dates: she loved me for that.) Then I plunged. 'You have no definite time for writing,' I said, consulting my pad, as if she'd imparted the news. 'You work when the mood seizes you. Sometimes there are days and weeks when you are unable to write a line, and then the fury falls upon you, and you work until you are exhausted.' 'True! true!' says she. I continued: 'Your characters take such hold on you that they seem entirely real. Sometimes they get away from you altogether, and do deeds you had never intended.' 'Yes! yes!' says she. 'Then,' I concluded, having got her bias, 'I think I have everything you would wish me to say.' So I've given her a column and a half. I 'gowned' her in a trailing silk, and made the pearl pin into a set. It cost me nothing."

"What else?" said Brandon.

"Oh, the other stroke? Well, you know Blaisdell, who has kept the Tennysonian pose of exclusiveness ever since he published that tuppenny story? Wishes to be considered a private gentleman, and smacks his lips over that particular kind of notoriety. Well, I was in the express office when his wife came in with a package addressed to Cail Brothers. The clerk asked its value, and she could n't resist. 'You may put it down fifty dollars,' said she, bridling, 'but it's

a thousand-dollar manuscript.' I literally ran to the office, and this is what that wretched woman reads to-night: 'We have trustworthy authority for saying that L. M. Blaisdell receives a thousand dollars for his serial announced by Cail.' Won't he be hopping? Well, Llandaff, your doom is sealed."

He looked up eagerly, and Margaret laid down her fork. They both knew what she meant: occupation, daily bread, a start in life.

"Next week the 'Householder' comes into being. I'm engaged for crochet and griddlecakes, and you are to be general slavey. You are to do the agricultural column" —

"I don't know anything about agriculture!"

"All the better," put in Brandon. "You won't make mistakes."

"The Religious Musings, Notes and Queries, and the Mechanical Arts," continued Laura. "And you are to receive the munificent sum of twelve dollars a week."

"But, by George!" said Warrener, getting up and thrusting his hands in his pockets during the throes of a rapid calculation, "that's only a little over six hundred a year!"

"Consider yourself lucky. Fortune's favorites don't live in Babine. I had ten dollars a week at the start, and when I told my owner that my expenses were twelve, he said he did n't know anything about that. And he did n't, you know. It was unanswerable."

Warrener was looking very gloomy. He paced about the room, and caressed his upper lip. Margaret regarded him with an anxious frown.

"But we can't live!" he ejaculated.

"*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*," quoted Laura in a murmur. She had thrown back her head, and seemed in the way of going to sleep.

Warrener was the thrall of an unreasoning hopefulness. His face cleared, and a smile ran over it.

"But I can rise!" he announced.

Margaret's look was the mirror of his. She lifted her head with a little joyous motion and gave the others a nod of triumph.

"So can bread," responded Laura, from drowsy distances, "but the temperature has to be right. You'll find the 'Householder's' 'a nipping and an eager air.' You'll have a funny column, too. I forgot to say so."

"Mechanical Arts, Agriculture, Religious Musings," he recapitulated.

"*And Notes and Queries*. At first you make up the *Queries*; just as, in the West, they kill a man to start a graveyard."

Margaret looked her distaste. She was not yet used to Laura's gentlemanlike conversation. She herself had known the frank give and take of dramatic life, but having striven for some years to model herself anew, she was now clothed in a natural fastidiousness with some superadded caution. Laura's freedom seemed to her not so much vulgarity as an affected license. She had not followed the other woman far enough in a hard career to understand how, in fighting shoulder to shoulder with men, she had taken up their ways of speech with their acceptance of life as a competitive industry. Brandon sat still, his legs stretched into space. He had taken off his glasses, and his eyes were shut.

"That 's easy," said he, "Notes and Queries. Make 'em social at first. In going to singing school or lecture, should a lady expect her escort to walk in the gutter? Is it considered proper in the best society to use baking powder? Should a gentleman remove his overshoes at a picnic? Would an Indian arrow-head make an appropriate wedding present?"

Warrener frowned; he was thinking very seriously of his newborn career, and ambition seemed to be fading fast into the light of a too common day. Laura sat up, pushed back her hair, and blinked her eyes into wakefulness.

"Pass me that bag," said she. "There, Channie, on that stool." She pulled out a mass of papers and ran them over. "Here!" she said, selecting a bundle, "here, Llandaff, your Paris letters."

A shade fell upon his face. He took the papers, and turned them over with uncertain hands.

"They don't want them?" he asked. "Not at all?"

"Not in the least," said Laura, with absolute decision. "I had time to run them over on the way, and so I brought them back without offering them. It would only have hurt your cause. They've no touch, no *go*. They don't exist."

Brandon put on his glasses, and took the manuscript from Warrener's unresisting hold. He turned the pages, reading a paragraph here and there, while the author looked at him broodingly. Margaret also watched him, a flush rising in her face. Brandon gave a final nod, and laid the papers down.

"No," he said, "that won't do. Prentice work!"

"But I am a prentice! Masters are, in the beginning."

"Some masters," corrected Brandon. "But while you are a prentice, you 'll have to bide in patience. You must n't come to market."

"It 's as bald as the back of my hand," said Laura judicially. To her mind, criticism was criticism. You had no more reason for whining, when it hurt, than you had for browbeating the dentist. You went, you suffered, you came away. So did everybody. "I can't understand it. I did n't think you 'd set the river afire; but anybody can put down his own experience. That 's why we should all write one book, for the self-knowledge of the race. Like Channie here. He 's doing his. You had some rare years in Paris, playing at art. You own you were tremendously amused, and then at least you spent money, which is the reason you can't spend it now. You 've had your cake. Tell how it tasted." She looked from him to Margaret, and they turned their troubled faces on each other. Their minds teemed with reminiscence; but how could it be imparted, at least on paper?

"Come," said Laura, in a professional kindliness, "let 's see what the matter is. It 's too late to go to bed now. Burn some more sack, and maybe we can make something out of you yet. Paris has been done to death, but your life there was unique, and it can be uniquely painted. Come, Mrs. Warrener, you tell!"

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF LOVE

MARGARET looked at her husband for encouragement; but he was gazing into the space afforded by an open doorway and thinking rebellious thoughts. She began speaking rapidly and in a low tone; among these clever people, she was timid.

"I was in Paris. It was my first visit. I had been three years on the stage, and this was my summer vacation. I was going to study a little, buy some clothes, and go back to America for my season. Llandaff was in Paris." She turned to him again, as if hoping he might take up the tale; but, looking down now, he frowned a little at his hands, and she went on. "You know about him. He had been living in the West, studying law and having an awful time of it. Then his aunt left him some money, and he burned his law books and ran off to Paris to study art. We met and — we were married very soon." Her voice fell, and that fickle flush grew in her cheeks. Instinctively she turned to him again, for some sign of answering emotion. Brandon, in his corner, stirred uneasily. He knew the glance for that of a woman who loved much; in chivalry, at least, it should have been met.

"Now is that any way to speak?" complained

Laura. "You met, you married! Scene: Paris. Dramatis Personæ: young artist, young actress. Material for a dozen romances. If you had any *sabe* you could feed on that for years. Can't you picture?"

Margaret did not answer. She seemed to have withdrawn into some corner of memory; her face lighted now, and she continued:—

"We took a dingy little apartment, and it blossomed like a rose. Llandaff at once saw all sorts of possibilities in it. He's the one with eyes, you know. We began with almost nothing, — bed, table, two chairs, because just then most of the money was tied up and he could n't get at it. He said our *salon* needed only a lump of charcoal and a starving grisette to compose for a modern picture. Paris was quite new to me, and oh! enchanting. Llandaff had learned where everything was to be bought, and how much it should cost, and it was as good as a play to hear him chaffer with old women in *argot*. They were invariably charmed with him, and so was I. So was he, too, for that matter! And he always got what he wanted."

"Too much 'Llandaff'!" murmured Laura. "Don't be a parrot, madam. Tell how things seemed to you."

"Well," said Warrener shortly, "that's all there is of it. We lived there six years. I spent my money and sold the Matlock house, to go on painting. But I could n't sell any pictures, and I lost every sou in the panic. So the cupboard was bare and we came back. You know that. What more can I say?"

"Arid as a treeless plain," commented Laura. "'Scene: a blasted heath.'" Here Brandon, with

a bow to Margaret, slipped silently out and took his way to bed. "I could write a book out of it: 'Furnishing an Apartment in Paris;' 'Makeshifts of a Poor Artist.' You were poor, virtually, you see, though there was money then in the background."

"Of course we were poor," answered Margaret for him. "I'd spent all my money on a new stage outfit from Juliet to Beatrice, and that was sheer loss. For of course Llandaff would n't tolerate my going back to the stage. So there in that wee apartment were I and my long-tailed gowns. But we got something out of them, after all. Do you remember, Llandaff, how I used to dress for dinner while you cooked the chop? And the night we took in the stray kitten, and she stole the fish from the platter and left us supperless?"

"All which is excellent material," said Laura, "told with simplicity and vividness. And you've written me a set of articles dealing with the statistics of suicide and the height of the Column Vendôme. Llandaff, I'm afraid you're no more journalist than painter."

Margaret started, for the words had stung. Warrener put his hands in his pockets, and began walking heavily up and down the room.

"No, I'm not a painter," he said. "Do you know the best word that was ever given me? It was Brandon's. 'You come somewhere near being a draughtsman,' said he, 'but your color's rotten.' You've seen 'em, Laura. There's no good in 'em?"

"Absolutely and entirely none," she responded, cheerfully. "Do you suppose I would n't have boosted 'em if I could? You should have had notices long as my arm. But they're no good, Llandaff. You're not

a bungler. You're an amateur ; I could n't say worse. You're a droll child, too. Poor as the stuff is, you did hope to sell it. You thought you could come home here, palm it off on some rich nobody, and redeem your fortunes. Did n't you, now ? ”

Margaret turned from one to the other with a mounting indignation. She waited for Llandaff to assert himself, but he was standing motionless, absorbed in thought.

“ I did hope there was something in them,” he said reflectively. “ At least I wished it.”

“ You wished it ! ” repeated Laura good-naturedly, rising. “ Wishes are n't horses, in art. Come, it's all hours, and I'm a working woman. To-morrow at ten I'll take you down and introduce you to the ‘ Householder.’ Good-night. Good-night, Margaret.”

The husband and wife went downstairs silently, but Margaret felt that wave of resistance within her mounting higher and higher. She had a passionate belief in her husband. Whatever he wished to do bettered, even at that stage, the things that had been done ; she could not hear him flouted. Her own delicate triumphs, in her days of acting, had been the fruit of some warm instinct guided by technique ; she had no deep intelligence to spend on other arts. So when they reached their rooms she watched him in her pauses of preparing for the night, while he walked about, a flush upon his brow. She thought it shame, distress ; but there she was at fault. The tonic of wholesome criticism was working in his blood ; his sanguine nature rose in arms at the thought of unconquered worlds. At last, her hair about her and her eyes alight, she went up to him and, with a gesture of unconscious beauty,

laid her hands upon his shoulders. "Why do you care?" she asked passionately, her voice thrilling. "She does n't know."

Llandaff came abstractedly out of his mood. He moved a pace, and her arms fell.

"Oh, I don't mind!" he said vaguely. But he was conscious that he did mind, and that he liked the taste of the new medicine.

Then Margaret made the blunder of recurring blindly to a litany not applicable to the moment.

"But you love me?" she asked, with that appealing inconsistency so divine if we have sought it, so exasperating when it echoes from another sphere.

"O Lord!" whispered Warrener under his breath. But he answered aloud, with a careful kindness, "Of course I do. What makes you ask that?"

If Margaret had been uniquely wise, she might have responded, "Because I am sleepy." But she had little knowledge of the maternal expediency which is the guardian of love. So she kept silence and went softly away to bed, where she could not sleep, while Llandaff swore perplexedly at himself for an irritation into which he had been sweetly goaded. He was tired of irrelevant emotions, and at that moment he was a little tired of his wife for demanding them.

Next morning Laura stopped on her way downstairs to find him at his door awaiting her. He was alert with expectation quite disproportioned, in her mind, to anything he could have, in his abortive middle youth, to call it forth. Again he found the world his oyster, and because he had not actually used the weapon now in hand, he had infinite faith in its temper. She looked him over, smiled, and raised her brows satiri-

cally. Then she addressed him from her plentiful irony: —

“What a shining morning face!”

Meantime Margaret, at her window, watched them on their way, and when they were out of sight sat down with her own spectres. In those days she would have seemed ridiculous to any unimaginative person who could have followed her about and taken note of her betrayals. All normal people, save good physicians, would have laughed at her. A victim of the reaction which follows ignorance as swiftly as it waits on sin, she had entered upon the initiatory pangs of hell. She might have seemed to you, sane madam, an hysterical child; and after a glimpse of her melodrama you could have gone to your committee meeting in fine security of mental balance. What was she? A sick soul, to whom no one had ministered because no one understood its ail.

When she and Llandaff met in Paris, the fire of his art love was burning low, dulled, he would have said, by failure. He had always been raging about something or other, and he was still fatally certain to lay hold of the first fuel within reach. Talent and emotion together make a pretty pair, and genius, with hot blood, might move the world; but when you find mere longing wedded to the inoperative hand or brain, then await your tragedy. The stream, choked in mid-channel, bursts forth and innocently devastates some fertile field. Llandaff poured out his very blood — and made bad pictures. He learned how bad they were, and then he practiced the flute and moped on the lines of Heine's lyrics. He fell in with a savant, and was just taking to the microscope when he met Margaret;

and immediately he loved her beyond any of his dreams, and lost no time in telling her so. The girl was at the blossoming time of life. She adored her profession without expecting to adore anything else. There were behind her some years of splendid study, and they had all told. An esoteric set in America was waking up to her. She anticipated her triumph, and already it was sweet in the mouth. So she came under the spell of a nature as vivid as her own, one which had never owed an allegiance not to be easily transferred. Llandaff, as a lover, could have lured the sirens out of the wave. He threw himself with ardor into as stormy a courtship as ever Paris saw, and when he touched land, his maiden was with him. Margaret had withstood him for the sake of her art; she was full of whims, covered all over with contrary little thorns of resistance; but she began by loving him and ended in capitulation. Llandaff vetoed the stage, and she gave it up with sacrificial tears in secret, though holding it all too little to renounce. Then followed an unbroken course of happiness, wherein the two souls fancied themselves miraculously blended into one. But that can rarely happen; for the God of us all has a way, now and then, of tightening the cord by which He holds us, possibly to show us how alone we are. He was just beginning the process with these two, and they failed to understand it.

Margaret, like many another artist, was born to be a solitary and ache with lonesomeness. It had been hard for her to acquire the habit of dual living; and there had been days when she cut her husband to the heart by chill remoteness. Then she came back repentant, and neither of them guessing out the root of

the matter, he held her more adorable than ever, while she became all woman and delighted in her bond. He surrounded her with a thousand sweet observances; he was the most chivalrous lover under heaven. The sport of their more humorous friends, they turned only to each other, until their mutual image almost shut out the sun. The wife's love for him became a passion blended of woman's natural warmth and the diverted current of her art, and he, who demanded but one world at a time, made her orbit his. Then, as she had said in rehearsing their story, he was recalled to the practical exigencies of life, and came home to retrieve his fortunes with some fatuous hope of selling in America pictures too bad to be painted in France. Here they met Laura Neale, a remote cousin of his, and she led them straightway into her own world, where Llandaff saw boundless acreage yet untilled and where she alone was his good genius. A great reaction had set in. Life comes in cycles, and with Warrener they were sharply definite. He had never made his way in life nor asserted his manhood; Laura had made her way and shown a fibre as unflinching as any man's. Therefore he allied himself to her, and Margaret, unconsciously ignored, was behaving like a sulky child, trying to be good, and inwardly breaking her heart.

This morning she sat down by the window, and her face fell into the apathy of grief. Like a woman, — for she was all the more woman for the sleeping power within her, — she abandoned herself to the bewilderment of pain. She felt like a very little person in a very large night. For years she had been taught that it was lovely to live in a certain way; and now in



a moment the pageant had vanished. She must do something else, and the pity of it was that there was nothing ready to do. Everybody had been dancing, and all at once her partner had dropped her hand and gone skipping off through the forest with somebody else.

While she sat there trying in woman-fashion to think things clear, instead of accepting them, spotless or not, there came a knock at the door. She answered it; for sometimes Bebington would announce a caller, but more often, with beguiling phrases relating to her own sciatica, she wafted him up the stairs whether he would or no. At the door stood a handsome old man, a thought like Michelangelo, and a little old lady in rusty black, with short white hair. Margaret uttered a sound of joy. They were Llandaff's friends, and their unheralded presence seemed to bring him nearer. She had seen them in Paris, and they made her past life walk and live.

"Yes, my dear, yes," said Miss Olivia Milbanke, putting up both hands to the younger woman's shoulders and giving her a kiss, "I said you'd be glad. But not half so glad as we are!"

Doctor Milbanke had been drawing off his glove, and he stood looking at Margaret, smiling warmly. Last year the two young people had seemed like squirrels playing at nests, and gone straight to those older hearts. But as his gaze intensified, it grew more keen. He was none the less a doctor for ceasing to practice, and he saw how vitally things had changed.

"Come in," said Margaret, brightening every minute. "Oh, I'm sorry Llandaff has gone! He'll be sorry, too."

"Another time, dear," said Miss Milbanke, seating herself and folding her cotton-gloved hands. "We shall come often, and you 'll come to us."

They were an odd contrast, the two. The doctor was adorned by his fur-lined cloak and his general air of completeness. New England's Sydney Smith had characterized him as having been reared "in the very lap of cocktails." But his sister, in her decent black, was less like his sister than some rusty person of low degree, until you traveled from her poor attire up to her face, followed its delicate lines, and met the steady light of its blue eyes. She had theories about the responsibilities of wealth; the doctor walked in silk attire, and upheld its dignity.

"When did you come?" asked Margaret, looking at them with happy eyes.

"We got into New York day before yesterday," said the doctor. "So you see we did n't let the grass grow — or the snow fly — before coming to you."

"And you've actually seen Paris in — how long?"

"Ten days ago. Dined at Café Véfour. Does that please you?"

"Dear Paris!" she breathed, and her eyes filled.

"Silly child!" said the doctor, but as if he loved her. "Boston is quite as good; New York better."

Miss Olivia bent forward to pat Margaret's hand.

"I'm afraid we have more misery here," she said.

"Or else they cover it up."

"I should hope they would," said the doctor. "Meddlesome old woman! What do you suppose she's been doing?"

"Good!"

"Clever child! Remarkable guess! Attempted

good with a flavor of folderol. Nursing an old harri-dan in the steerage and probably getting smallpox. Don't come near her. She's infected."

"Dear lady!" said Margaret softly, and Miss Milbanke, coloring a little, patted her hand again.

"Look at that cropped head of hers!" continued the doctor remorselessly, turning it by a bonnet-string. "Had her hair cut on the steamer."

"It took a great deal of time," said the old lady, glancing sweetly from one to the other, "and there was so much to do."

"So because a pauper immigrant had to be nursed, I'm to lose a respectable long-haired saint at the head of my table and accept a Puritan crop-head. I won't stand it, Margaret! Now what do you suppose we've left outside in the carriage?"

Margaret pursed her lips and reflected. Miss Milbanke looked at her in a gentle distress. Yet the doctor was to be trusted, and they both knew it.

"A basket," quoth he. "In the basket fried chicken, Welsh rarebit, broiled live lobster, peacocks' breasts, ortolans, nightingales' tongues" —

"James," said the old lady mildly, "is this the truth? Let your yea be yea" —

"The simple truth. Only not the whole truth. God knows that could n't be told in a fortnight. To speak with moderation, she is carrying all the delicacies furthest out of season down to a set of paupers whom she has been supporting throughout her year abroad, thereby forcing me to support her. This is the initial visit. The basket is an earnest of what they are to expect."

"James, do we need to occupy our call with this?"

"We do, madam, we do," responded the doctor, smiling upon her with pride and fondness. "There, Margaret! that's how the old lady strikes a contemporary. But tell us about you. How do you like 'the States'?"

"Oh — I don't know!" In spite of herself, her eyes filled. She had not slept much of late.

"Llandaff well?"

"Yes."

The doctor's face cleared, and when the door opened and Warrener came in full of business and brisk with the cold, it gained a new look of relief. Llandaff was marvelously changed since that morning even, and Margaret, seeing his determined brightness, felt at once the exhilaration of hope. He was happy; therefore all must be well.

"Miss Milbanke!" he cried.

"Good boy!" said the doctor, smiling up at him. "You're a fine figure of a man. Margaret's roses are gone, and yours are blowing. What's in the wind?"

"Much!" returned Llandaff grandiloquently, tossing down his hat and a bundle of papers. "The rise of the house of Warrener. I am a journalist."

"The mischief you are! Where's art?"

"Dead."

"Doornail again? You'll be setting up a hardware shop."

Miss Milbanke rose, and began fastening her cloak. The doctor followed her.

"When will you dine with us, children?" he asked. "Which is the properest day?"

Llandaff's eyes had not lost their vivid look, the signal of stimulated emotion.

"Not for weeks and weeks!" he cried. "Margaret may, but I don't know yet how many hours I've got to grind. I've brought home a bundle of exchanges to work on. Get facts, you know! Don't ask us yet, please. Not me, at least!"

The doctor smiled at him as if he thought him very young indeed, and Miss Milbanke included them all in her loving-kindness. So they went their way, he grumbling at her, she murmuring soft reproof, and each delighting in the other. They were not halfway down the stairs when Llandaff, the papers before him, bent with squared elbows to his task.

"Don't speak to me now, Margaret," said he. "Here's something about ancient medical remedies, O Lord, yes! and rice-eating in China. I can make two tidy articles at least."

Margaret, trying to efface herself over a book, glanced up at him from time to time. Her heart was swelling in sympathy. She knew exactly what measure of respect a pot-boiler may deserve; yet the work of her husband's hand was precious to her. In his eyes, this might seem a meagre journalism; to her it was literature.

CHAPTER III

THE CHILD IN THE HOUSE

THE dinner invitation came and was not accepted. Llandaff proved too busy, and so he continued to be, not, possibly, because his work ate up all the hours of the day, but only that he had a great idea of what he called pitching in. The profession of journalism might have been a mechanical art, and he one of those masterful apprentices who determine to follow all the steps of their trade in sequence. It had happened with him before; and it had happened also that, reaching a certain altitude, he paused, though it was a part of his mobility that, before the event, he never anticipated stopping. So each last blossom remained unspoiled by memory of a former blight. He dashed into the dry compilations required of him with the zest of a war correspondent chronicling the feats of nations. Such freshness and cleverness as he could bring to bear had a brisk effect, and Laura was nearly always at hand to supply technical deficiencies. He seemed to her a child playing with practical issues of no special importance, and likely, with the luck of fools, to fall thereby into some haphazard fortune. So she responded to his zeal, without thinking it necessary to tell him how primitive it seemed to her, and Llandaff lived in a glow over her friendly offices. In

the intervals of his own work, he followed her about, trying to gain some insight into the broader aspects of journalism ; and so it happened that her admission to public places included him. Often he was puzzled to find that this Amazon of the press could be sent to interview a celebrity, to write up a social function, or take hold of some utilitarian project like the introduction of a cooker or the advent of new sleeves ; but he laid his wonder to sleep with the remembrance that hers was not the first hand to carve cherry-stones. He had a boundless faith in her. When he imagined himself writing great leaders and predicting political weather, he saw her beside him, his giant counterpart. His horses of the sun were always running away, and no disaster could teach him the daily use of bit and bridle.

On a night of rare leisure, the household assembled in Laura's room for an hour of friendly gossip. They had, at these moments of concurring idleness, a good deal of healthy give and take of a sort quite unknown to family life. The bond of intercourse was lightly held. They were on familiar terms of fraternal service and abuse ; yet no one save the husband and wife owed any moral tribute, the one to the other. They could speak with an ideal frankness, and no one was in the least disturbed if another proved momentarily ill-tempered, vain, morose. The temptation of emotional friendship to idealize and doat was not with them. They had all the peaceful security of a pleasant relation which exacted nothing and might end to-morrow.

Laura lay prone among the pillows. Her face looked gray, the hollows deepened under the eyes ; she

was very tired. Llandaff had a corner of the sofa, where he sat with his hands clasped about his knees and looked from one to the other, as they spoke, with a tension of feeling quite foreign to the atmosphere of the place. He never knew when he might learn something more about journalism. Brandon wandered about, taking up a paper here and there, and irritably putting it down again. Margaret had a chair by the open grate. She was distraught, puzzled, but she fed the fire, from time to time, and tried to look at home.

"Channie, do sit down!" said Laura at length. "You make me nervous."

"Then I'll go," returned Brandon absently. "I was going anyway."

"I know why. You have n't had your pipe. Stupid! have it here."

"No, thanks."

"Why not?"

Involuntarily he glanced at Margaret. Laura lifted her brows in satirical recognition.

"You don't mind me!" she said.

"No, I don't mind you."

Margaret smiled slightly at him, and shook her head. She seldom understood him, but he had thrown over their intercourse an atmosphere of personal kindness, and she was grateful.

"Don't mind me either, Mr. Brandon."

"I must," he said, throwing himself down in a chair. "I don't want to, but I must. I'm cursed with a sense of fitness."

"Now I protest," said Laura. "Is this Republic to be spoiled, like the first one, by a woman? Mar-

garet, if you've the spirit of a mouse, you'll take to cigarettes and destroy their illusions."

"I can do it by proxy." Margaret went over to the littered table, and after searching, brought out a package of cigarettes. She offered her husband one, and he let her light it for him. Then she carried them to Brandon, and won a smile.

"Since you will," he said, "may I have my pipe?"

"The barriers are down," announced Laura. "Now I hope we can be ourselves. Margaret, pass him that tobacco jar."

Brandon took out his ugly bulldog from the pocket it distorted, and filled it, with a bad conscience and contented mind. He began puffing at it in pure love of the only pleasure that seemed to him unalloyed; and Margaret returned to the fire. She was a silent woman in these days, and not an interesting one; the changed conditions of her life had left her dulled.

"Now," began Laura, "let's talk. I've got a bon-bon for you later: the little singer up in the loft. Have n't you met her?"

"I've seen a mouse of a creature with a pale face and Duse chin," said Brandon. "How do you know she's a singer? She does n't sing."

"There's the tragedy. She's charged with temperament" —

"O Lord!" groaned Brandon.

"Just as you like; but it's there all the same. Here's her history. She had a phenomenal voice and great dramatic instinct. Some women folks sent her on here to study, and big things were expected."

"I've heard of 'em. It is the unexpected that happens."

"I was sent to write her up, but she 'd gone into the country to rest. When she came back, there was no question of interviews. Fortune had bowled her over. She 'd had laryngitis, and a quack painted her throat with lunar caustic, and incidentally and quite by the way touched the vocal chords. So she lost her high notes. She is a fierce little Puritan, and when she found herself no good, threw off her benefactors and sent them back what money she had left. And now she's earning bread and water by translating German songs."

"You got them for her," remarked Llandaff. "Of course you did!"

"I like to move about the pieces," said Laura, "when it is n't too much trouble."

"You do amuse me," put in Brandon, considering his pipe, mentally resolving not to have a second, and knowing he should. "I never met a gracious lady who cared less about the human animal than you do; but the way you seize upon promising material and boost it, is refreshing to a degree. You must be what the English call a promoter."

"I know it. It amuses me — a little."

"You are always finding combinations. Why don't you write a play?"

"Can't. Have n't the spark. Write it yourself."

"So I would, if you 'd give me a model."

Margaret pricked up her ears. Her dramatic instinct, though dormant, was still there.

"What do you mean by a model?" she asked of Brandon.

He turned to her with the distinct deference which it was his pleasure to show her in this atmosphere.

"Only the formula of my limitations. I'm a very interesting person, Mrs. Warrener. I can do bang-up work. I've done it. But it's entirely imitative. My mind has a trick at that. I did a lot of love poetry once — Lesbia, you know, Chloe, that sort of thing — and folks ran after me; but I'd been taking a debauch of Elizabethan lyrics, and none of the dear ladies were clever enough to know it. If I get permeated with the spirit of a period, I give out a few faint flashes like unto it. If I am drunk with a human situation, I'll bet you a play or a story out of it. But there's nothing real in it."

"Write a play for the Minerva Club," said Laura. "They want one. Their biennial saturnalia is on the way, and they're having the de'il's own time rehearsing Antigone. The ones who know Greek can't seem to act, and the others are all Furiosas because they've only posturing to do. Hush! I believe she's coming — Teresa Hope."

A light step sounded outside, and the girl must have heard her name. In a sudden timidity she turned away; but Laura was at the door, and flung aside the curtain.

"Come," she said, and drew the stranger in. "This is Teresa Hope."

The girl stood there in the doorway for a second, framed by the dull red of the portière, and the four who looked up at her were moved to an unwonted interest. A little defiance breathed from her, and she met their eyes steadfastly with a timidity which belied itself and seemed a challenge. She was very slight, and her dark brown hair grew irregularly about the low forehead. Her eyes were dark, and

her mouth, fascinatingly irregular in a way not quite to be described, had a line of scarlet lip. She was dressed severely in black, and her hands and feet were exquisite.

"This is Teresa Hope," said Laura; "and here, Miss Hope, is Babine, the Republic of Fools."

The others were at once on their feet, and Brandon frowned briefly at the bluntness of the introduction. Laura drew the girl to a chair, and gave her footstool and pillow, with an air of a good-natured patronage. Then she began to get out the mugs and cheese, and went on:

"The Republic of Fools had its origin four years ago in a discovery of my own. I happened to find in Larousse — what did I find, Channie?"

"The Republic of Babine, an association formed in Poland in the reign of Sigismund-Auguste, by a Polish gentleman, in his territory of Babine. It was composed of persons remarkable for some ridiculous or imbecile action, or some weird and striking humor. It was a Republic of Fools, which had no object save pleasure.'" This was recited by Brandon, his eyes on the girl, who sat looking gravely back at him.

"Yes. So I came home, and I said to the very original black spirits in this house, 'This is Babine, the Republic of Fools.' The society was born, and it has lived, like the boy's jackknife, in defiance of repair. It exists only under this roof. Move away, and you are dead. Men have come and men have gone, but this goes on. If you offend any member, he may expel you at once; but that does n't matter, for you can straightway vote yourself in again. If you want a new by-law, you can frame it, move that it

be accepted, second your own motion, and there you are. Do you want the list of membership? That gentleman there, known as Bayard Brandon" (Brandon rose and made his bow), "is the Chancellor. Mrs. Warrenner, cutting cheese here by the fire, is — I don't know why, save that the Chancellor named her — the Lady. Her husband over there is, by my christening, the Heir Apparent. I think I did it because he has such a fancy for inheriting the earth. You may join if you like."

"But what could I be?" she asked, smiling a little at Brandon.

"You shall be the Child," he said, answering her smile and speaking very gently.

"And what are you?" she continued, turning again to Laura.

"I? Oh, I forgot! There, Margaret, that cheese is fine enough. You shave it passionately, as one that hath a conscience. I'm the Tame Huntress. That's very involved. You see we feed on Welsh rabbits, and I catch 'em. There are two more of us. I hear them now. One is the Guardsman, because he looks it and is n't, and the other is the Poet, because he wants to be."

At that moment, a tall, thin young man, holding a soft hat and wearing a cloak of many capes, appeared at the door. His face was striking enough for a medallion: ivory pale, with an unkempt mass of soft black hair. This was William Deane, who wrote verse for pastime, and got his bread in some mysterious fashion not acknowledged as literature. Some said a far-away father made him an allowance sufficient for bread and cheese; others that he did pot-

boilers destined never to be owned. Behind him was another man, also tall, but well-poised and muscular. His yellow hair was cropped short, and his features, of a precision essentially manly, arrested the eye, and cheated it, pronouncing him English. His close mustache looked military above the short chin, and his blue eyes were deeply set. This man, Thomas St. John, slowly possessed himself of a chair beside Teresa and gazed at her, not smiling at all, as if she were a new picture — a pleasing one — in the room. Teresa looked at him, and found herself saying under her breath, —

“You must be the Guardsman.”

“Yes, so they tell me. What do they mean by it?”

She gave a little laugh. She felt at home with him.

“Oh, I know!” said she.

“That’s more than I do. But I won’t ask them, they’re so confoundedly clever. I suppose your’re clever, too!”

“No, I’m not.” A change passed swiftly over her face, at the responsive thought of the one lost gift which had promised her distinction. But for the moment she was too light-hearted to harbor it. “Not in the least.”

“Are you going to help them play Tom Fool?”

“They’ve asked me to.”

“What do they call you?”

“The Child.”

He continued looking at her, a softened light in his eyes. They smiled. His eyes had always been a potent factor in his life, though, not being given to speculation on the causes of things, he had not dis-

covered it. They were often expressing an acuteness of emotion which the man himself had seldom felt; and women read in them the sign of an ineffable sympathy. This he never guessed. He had only the puzzled consciousness that people were always expecting you to give something or other which you were quite willing to do if you only knew what it was. But now, when his face lighted, it did mean something.

"The Child," he said to himself. "Yes, I can see that."

Then the plates came round, and the Poet, after eating very fast, fell into a monologue too unconsidered to be reproduced; nothing less than a summary of end-of-the-century fads, all about Jacobitism and the music of the future, destined to supersede Wagner, though Wagner was very well for the present when you could get nothing better, and about the Dorset dialect and a statue to William Barnes, together with the speaker's own pre-matutinal difficulty in managing the halting sestet in a very remarkable sonnet. All this, spoken in a discordant voice, likely to break when demands were laid upon it, was calculated to excite some sort of interest. But nobody listened save Teresa and the Guardsman: she from a certain perplexity, and he because it seemed good form to show a semblance of attention when people are talking. The others had heard it all before, even to the decrepitude of this same sonnet, and they addressed themselves, with great assiduity, to food and their own thoughts.

"There, Poet, pass the chutney," said Laura, at length. "Let me talk now. You've held the floor — and the chutney — long enough."

"But it isn't in the least degree probable that any one of you has had a day like mine," said Deane, with unblemished good-nature. "You've been tossing about in the world like marbles in a gutter, and I have had rosy dreams. I should call my day a perfectly white day, only once broken, — by Beb. She came to do up the room. God knows why. I never could understand this insatiate passion for making beds. But I got her to brew me some tea, and all was well; for thereby I snuggled down for three hours more. If she had n't come to make beds so early, she might have made beds earlier. Are you in this Republic?" he asked abruptly of St. John.

"They say so."

"I don't see why."

"I don't either."

"You're not one of us!"

"Who is — us?" came a reedy voice out of the corner.

Laura smiled. She liked small upheavals.

"The Child is taking sides," she murmured to Warrener.

Deane turned about, and became aware of the slight figure in its nook. He was very unobservant, somewhat by nature and partly as a pose.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he croaked. "I only meant, we do something, you know. In the arts!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Brandon from his place. "Do you call this little local tempest in a teapot the arts? What are we doing? Earning money, three of us, more or less honestly. And you, — you're simply puddling, that's all."

"Now look here, Brandon," said the victim, thus

spitted and displayed, "you're hard on me; you're always mighty hard. Puddling! I'm a poet and I say so, and because I've got the nerve to do it, you call me down."

"Oh, 'say so'!" said Brandon, in large scorn.
"It's easy to say so. Let the other fellow talk."

"Come, don't fight," said St. John, "if I'm the crow you're picking. I don't do anything, more's the pity. I eat my dinner and smoke my pipe and go to bed. Wish I did n't. Wish I had dreams, like our friend here. Should n't find it so dull."

"It is dull," came Laura's voice from her pillows.
"Oh, so ineffably dull! The books tell about exciting moments, compelling men, irresistible women. There aren't any; and the worst of it is I'm glad there are n't. It would be infinitely duller to rise and cope with them. But oh, my stars! isn't the whole thing meagre!" Her voice vibrated with a rare emotion. Even Brandon, who thought he knew her, narrowed his eyes and looked at her penetratingly, as if he reversed a judgment.

"What would you like best in the world?" asked Llandaff, turning to her with one of his vivid personal appeals.

"I should like" — she spoke very slowly, and paused a moment to reflect before going on. Then she decided that the truth might be told. "I ask so little that millionaires would hoot at me. Llandaff, you know that house on the Matlock Road?"

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours. What was yours. You, children, don't know it, but this is its story in brief. I suppose you've taken note that Llandaff and I are a sort

of cousins. We had the same great-grandmother. When a certain aunt died, she left him, as the elder branch and a man, — they always get the cream, — a colonial house, Matlock way. He never lived in it. He went abroad ” —

“ I sold that house,” said Llandaff. “ There’s a chance to buy it back. I wish I had it.”

Laura sat upright, a spark smouldering in her eyes. Her dull complexion took on a tinge of light. These were the moments which disclosed in her a latent passion.

“ Well,” said she, “ I want that house. I believe I am marked with it. There’s something pre-natal and devilish about the whole thing. Llandaff, you remember how it came into the family? It was left to the sister of our great-grandmother by her lover, who died before they could be married. They say she worshiped it for his sake, every door and lintel of it. She never married, but, in some mysterious way, her love of it came down to me. I can remember when I was a little girl, walking up and down the stiff garden paths, and playing I was Aunt Isabel, smelling box and talking to the man. I can’t smell box to this day without thinking of him.”

“ The story took hold of your imagination,” said the Guardsman.

She made a little gesture of denial.

“ Something took hold of my life,” she said, scorning lesser issues. “ I don’t know what it was. It is the forces we don’t understand that clutch and hold us. Now, if anything on this godless earth could make anybody happy, it would make me happy to own that house, to live in it, lie there in the sun, eat, drink, and sleep in it.”

Llandaff forgot the others. He leaned forward, his eyes seeking hers.

"You shall! you shall!" he said rapidly. "I sold it, and I'll get it back. You shall live there with us, and never go away."

Margaret came bolt upright, a quick protest in her air. But her rebuking glance was not for the man who made the speech; it swept the woman who had evoked it. To the others, the atmosphere seemed suddenly charged. They had caught one spark; they looked for another. But Laura was recalled. She laughed a little.

"You!" she said to Llandaff, with a kindly scorn. "You! Well, buy it if you like. You're as likely to get it on twelve dollars a week as I am on thirty."

"Those pre-natal influences," began Deane.

"Oh, don't talk about them!" she said hastily. "Don't talk about anything. I can give up the house, Poet. I can live on thirty dollars a week till I drop into a pauper's grave; but I can't stand your monologues."

"Nor I, nor any of us," agreed Brandon. "Except, of course, new members. They are smooth white pages, William, on which, with their permission, you may write. Our brains are palimpsests, scrawled and re-scrawled with that too fatal script. I recommend that you appoint meetings with Miss Hope and Mr. St. John, when the rest of us are otherwise engaged. Time for sleep. At least for me. Tomorrow's coming."

Yet when Brandon reached his chamber, he did not sleep, but took out a disorderly pile of manuscript, locked away in a drawer. It was the last instalment

of his book, which he talked about very freely, though no one ever saw it. This book it was, he said, which had saved him from too keen friendship and latterly the desire of woman's love. Here he put down his own life, red-hot as he lived it, or dull as ashes. When it was written, it seemed to die; and then, another phase crowding upon him, he burned it. So he deadened in himself the ache of human loneliness, whence come tragedies and now and then a farce. But this was not a night for the book. Life swept too near. It daunted him. He put pen and paper away, and drew his worn chair into the window niche. There he sat looking down the street, where, under the flaring lights, the water lay impenetrable. He smoked a pipe, and his black mood came upon him. The shadows of mortality fell heavy everywhere. He bowed under what seemed to him the curse of being. When he got up, he looked once more into the night, this time at the sky, and said the only prayer he ever prayed, choosing it not from any hunger, but because the form of it was suited to his bitter fancy:—

“O God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul.”

CHAPTER IV

A MEETING BY THE WAY

It was easy for Laura to rule, chiefly because she arranged her pieces in advance, and yet seemed to disturb herself so little about the scheme that you felt it to be in the nature of things. Now she took hold of Teresa's prospects with a vigorous hand, and decreed that she should sing at a woman's club. Teresa lay awake that night shuddering, but when the next day came, like a nightmare fulfilled, she went obediently and in desperation. Certain clear notes were gone; she knew that, and thought she knew more. A child in experience, her loss seemed to her complete and final. She had no idea of nursing her gift with the desperate patience of those who are older in art. Like a ruined gambler, she was scornfully willing to show her own inadequacy. Clad, like Consuelo, in a little black silk, she met Laura at the club-room, facing, as they entered, something less than a hundred intelligent ladies talking in groups, and the sight devastated her forces at the start. How poor and unprotected she felt without her talisman! And it was not there. She knew it, even under Laura's dominating spell. Her song was to come after the business meeting, and for half an hour she sat there in a physical agony. Her throat grew dry and her hands

cold ; her frame was shaken. Finally came the acme of nervous despair, and she whispered chokingly to Laura, —

“ I ’m going ! ”

“ Where ? ”

“ Home.”

“ But you ’ve got to sing ! ”

“ I can’t sing.”

Before the promoter could lay mental grasp upon her, she rose and, shadowlike, stole out. Her hat and little rusty jacket looked so dear to her, seizing them with trembling fingers ! Then she fled downstairs and out into the street, just beginning to flare with lamps. Common things seemed friendly because she had escaped. The shop windows smiled ; the cars were havens of refuge. She could have nodded to the people, such as were not intelligent : and then a sob rose in her throat and two tears fell. At that moment she came face to face with St. John, and, seeing the tears, he took off his hat and turned to walk beside her.

“ Oh, come now ! ” said he. “ Take my arm ! ” It was all the panacea he could remember.

Teresa gave a queer little sob, half laugh. She understood him well.

“ No,” she said, “ it ’s not so bad as that. Go away. You ’ll be conspicuous with a crying woman.”

“ I wish you would n’t,” he said, in a futile way.

“ I could go in somewhere and buy a veil. No, I can’t. I have n’t any money. Oh, do please let me be ! ”

He stopped short, illumined by an idea. “ See here ! the Japanese tea-rooms ! A friendly little table in the corner ! What do you say ? We ’ll go

in. We 'll order tea, and while I drink it, you cry into your cup."

Teresa felt like a child whom a large and beneficent creature has taken by the hand, to lead her into happy regions of chocolate trees and lemony rivers. She walked meekly up the steps beside him, and into the shaded room. Some ladies were chattering over their tea, but the voices raised in her only a temporary panic, recalling, as they did, that intellectual purlieu whence she had escaped. She furtively dried her cheeks.

The hospitable English girl, absurdly masquerading as a Japanese, came forward.

"Tea!" said the Guardsman, with the air of a discoverer.

"And muffins?" responded she of the kimono and artificial brows.

His eyes were smiling on Teresa.

"Muffins?" he repeated gently, as one coaxes a child, and she caught herself smiling, too. "Muffins," he continued to the damsel. "Toasted, I hope?"

"Toasted, sir!"

"Brown!"

To Teresa it was a beautiful antiphony. The smile stayed wanly upon her face. She looked her gratitude, though without thinking it necessary to mention it. He seemed to her like somebody she had known all her life, in a dozen lives, appearing when her path had grown too hard.

"Oh," she breathed, "how good you are!"

"You're smiling a little," he warned her. "When the muffins come, you 'll laugh. Tell a fellow what it was? Can't you?"

A sob caught her in the throat. Her face settled into grieving lines, and the Guardsman cursed himself.

"Fool!" he muttered, with a qualifying word; and then the muffins came, the masquerader disappeared, and Teresa began pouring tea. He noticed what a delicate hand she had, and while he thought of that, she held the teapot poised, and asked with great solicitude, —

"Strong?"

"Very." He spoke encouragingly, and then it came to him that more manipulation would take up her mind.

"No, I think on the whole it might be weakened. There, that's exactly right. Just the color! Thank you."

Teresa poured her own tea, and for the moment forgot him quite. She doctored it, like a child over a tea-set, adding a little cream, a little sugar, tasting and reconsidering. Suddenly she looked across the table at him.

"Do you know," she said confidentially, "this is the very best time I've had since I came to town."

"Good! That does n't say much for the rest. Found it slow, have you?"

She was absorbed in her muffin.

"Not slow," she corrected him. "I was busy, studying."

"Studying what?"

"Singing."

Again the shadow settled on her face. He drank his tea hastily and asked for more, seeing, with an amusement almost affectionate, how careful she was to pour it as he had bidden her. She finished her muf-

fin, and then folded her hands and looked at him, frowning a little. She spoke with gentle emphasis: —

“Now I’ll tell you what I was crying about.”

“Shall you do it again?” asked St. John, with an exaggerated apprehension.

“No! that’s over. I cried because I was scared, and I’m not scared any more. You see Miss Neale took me to sing to some ladies. Really, I don’t know why I went!”

“Hypnotized! She’s always shuffling cards. I escape, but only because I’m a duffer. She knows I’ve no tricks. I sometimes fancy she’ll teach me two or three, in spite of myself.”

“I went there and saw all the people, and I got panic and ran. But why I should cry — yes, I understand that, too. It was because I remembered my voice as it was; and while I had that, no one could frighten me.” Her face became delicately suffused with the flush which was rare within its pure transparency. The pupils of her eyes enlarged and darkened. She had the power not so much of a beautiful woman as one born out of unique conditions to fill a part as new. St. John was never articulate about the soul; but having known the baser side of life, he had a reverent eye for what seemed sweet and worthy.

“The Child!” he said to himself under his breath.

Teresa had never told anybody in detail the story of her illness and the tragedy of its close. She had written the significant fact to her teachers and patrons, and had answered Laura’s questions in some bald fashion which betrayed no pain. But now she bent forward impulsively, and volunteered, “I am going to talk to you about my voice.”

"Yes, tell me!" He caught the infection of her mood. This sort of nature was new to him and yet familiar as sunsets or the dawn. He loved music ignorantly but well, and this was like hearing an unimagined song,—pure, passionate, full of delight. Teresa folded her hands in her lap.

"I had a voice," she said rapidly. "It was beautiful. Yes, it was! I was so sure of it that when they wanted to send me here to study, I did n't refuse for an instant. It was for my voice, and that was worth anything they could do. I always believed in it; and that made me bold." She had forgotten him; yet he could see how great a relief it was to speak. He formed some sympathetic medium, and her lips were opened. "Of course it was n't all pleasure, even here, where I wanted to be. Before, I had been letting myself go, singing as I liked, making a glorious noise. They said when it sounded best to me it was entirely wrong, and I'd got to unlearn everything. So of course I had blue days. If you have sung, you know. I was tired out, and went into the country to rest. There I was ill. I did n't care very much at the time, except that it delayed me. I knew I should get up well enough. I am so strong—though I seem delicate I am really strong—and I got well. I was languid, and it seemed a long time before I felt like singing at all. Then one day I tried, and it—was gone."

Now she looked at him. A wondering terror filled her eyes. She was not yet used to the memory of that moment. He felt the weight of the pity which cannot be expressed. She brought herself back with a sigh.

"Not quite gone, you know," she said, smiling

faintly, "but spoiled, hurt, broken. Sometimes I can sing a little. Miss Neale thinks it a matter of resolution. She thought I could this afternoon, but she does n't know. It is gone."

The chattering women had left the room. They two were alone, and the place had become quite still. St. John stretched out his hand across the table, and she met it frankly. It was an honest grasp and very sweet to her. It meant many things: affection, understanding, the kinship of our life. Teresa smiled at him.

"You're very good," she said simply, rising from the table and beginning to put on her gloves.

They went out in silence and walked homeward. To Teresa the air was full of some exciting quality, pleasant and yet strange. For the moment it seemed well to be alive, even without a voice. Perhaps her confidence had resurrected its image and made it live again, however briefly. St. John also was conscious of something so sweet that the heart could hardly fail to welcome it. His own existence had for a long time been very dull, and he had perhaps forgotten that people could feel intensely about anything. He thought himself old; but the breath of her youth crept his way and lingered in his nostrils. This was not alone the fascination of woman for man. It was only looking for a moment into a garden, fragrant still though blighted, and learning what an art may be when it is greatly loved. He had a good deal of wholesale contempt for the talk at the house, of "schools" and "milieu," and he had smiled a little in spite of himself when Brandon accused the poet of puddling. But here was a dear soul lamenting over a

gift which had been most precious to her ; and the sight stirred the mental recesses he kept for things removed and holy. The moment held a little glamour for them both, quite distinct from a city twilight and people hurrying home. They walked up the lonely street, and at the door turned, by old yet unconcerted habit, to look at the picture spread below. There was snow-covered ice in the river, and over it a rosy sky. The ice had broken up into wavering lagoons, and the rose overhead was bewilderingly reflected. Here were rivers of fire and islands with a burning heart and frosty shore. St. John thought of marshes as he had seen them under a sunset ; Teresa thought of heaven. She had the way of simple and fanciful souls of buoying herself by dreams about a land to which the known is comparable only at rare moments. Daily she assured herself that the fragmentary present would be reconstructed in another time. St. John waited on her mood with an impulse to watch her instead of the sky ; and there Laura found them.

" Well, missy," she called, coming up the street, " this won't do, you know." Teresa had put her to much inconvenience, but she could keep her temper. Life was not a matter to be fretted over.

St. John frowned. He felt an impulse to protect the Child ; but, fortified by the hour and his presence, she protected herself.

" I'm sorry," she said simply, " but it had to be. I told you I could n't sing. I never shall try again."

She went up the steps, and St. John let them in. Laura pursed her lips and shrugged her shoulders, pausing to look over her mail. She spoke absordly : —



“Very well, missy ; but you ’ll see yourself in to-morrow’s paper headed ‘Eccentricity of Genius.’ A good setting-out I’ve given you. Buy the morning ‘Telephone.’ ”

CHAPTER V

CROÆSUS IN BOHEMIA

TERESA went on to her room, without, indeed, listening to Laura ; but St. John, who had listened, still delayed. Laura fitted the key in her door.

"Is that true?" he asked. He was pulling off his glove, and he put the question with no great appearance of interest.

Laura was misled. She considered him a stupid fellow whose traditions stood him in the place of wit.

"What?" she returned.

"Your paragraph, your personal. Is that going into the 'Telephone'?"

"It'll do her good. Keep the public alive to her, till she gets back her voice."

"Is n't that a mistake?"

"A mistake?"

"Yes; the common mistake of interviews, personalities, everything that makes journalism detestable."

She dealt him a glance of malice.

"You ought to know," said she. "Come in, if we are to spar."

The Guardsman stepped inside, and stood holding his hat in an attitude of extreme deference.

"Yes," he responded quietly, "I ought to know."

I have figured there myself. And I think there might be some sort of justice in my begging off another victim. Let me run down town, and say it's not to go in. Give me a little note."

Laura had thrown off her hat and cloak, and was standing there, listening after a fashion, but really considering the prospect of supper. One phrase touched the spring of attention, and she turned to him.

"Upon my word!" said she. "And why?"

There was no reason to give, for a man no readier of speech; so he took refuge, according to custom, in that dignity which covers what we cannot say. At times, he had almost an old-fashioned air.

"It seems more — appropriate," he said simply. "I have an idea that the other thing is distinctly a mistake. Come!"

Laura's good-nature did not fail her.

"I don't care," she said. "It makes a good paragraph, and it gives the girl a lift. But if you want to go down" — She wrote a few words on a little tablet, and tore off the sheet. "There! I dare say you think you're doing something chivalrous. You're not; only something unpractical."

"Thank you," said the Guardsman gravely. He took the slip, and walked away with it. He was sure of one thing which required little argument: that the delicate creature upstairs had no need of meretricious advertising. He began to estimate her gift as she estimated it, in her sorrowful retrospect.

Meantime Laura looked about her disordered apartment, where plumbers had that day left their trace, and considered what she could do with a coming

guest. He was no Bohemian, whom skeletons could not affright. He had the normal vision, and a respect for normal things. She ran downstairs, and tapped at Margaret's door. Llandaff opened it without delay.

"Your knock," said he. "I knew it." His face glowed upon her, but Laura did not care. A man's liking was of no special consequence unless it meant bread and butter: better bread, more butter. She knew many varieties of male preference, and all were equally self-seeking.

"Margaret!" she called.

Margaret came forward. She was thinner. She had told Doctor Milbanke the day before that America was not agreeing with her.

"I'm in a fix," said Laura. "You can help me out. I'm to have company this evening — a millionaire — and my rooms are on end with plumbing. Could I bring him in here? You'd like it, you and Llandaff. He's nuts and raisins."

Margaret looked doubtfully at her husband.

"The Milbankes are coming," she hesitated, but Llandaff interrupted her.

"They'll be amused, enormously. If they are n't, there are the two rooms. Of course, Laura! Bring him along."

Margaret drew forward a chair, and Laura seated herself.

"I ought to explain," she said. "Really, it's a joke. So is his entire existence. I see scope in him for a tremendous story, — serious, you know, but bursting with laughter. You've heard of the man, Brownell, J. B. Brownell?"

"I have n't," said Margaret.

"Llandaff has, then. He could n't have missed him in the papers. J. B. infests them."

"Never heard of him," said Llandaff.

"Where are your eyes, man? In our profession you have to be covered with them, like a fly."

"Soap!" cried Llandaff, with a flash of memory. "Soap!"

"Good boy! He made his fortune in it, — or rather he made it out of Western land, inherited. At one time he owned a city or two, I believe. But it tickles his vanity to trace his greatness all to soap, and now he's going the whole figure in the primrose path of millionairessdom. He's had his yacht: the Ocean Belle. Is n't that neat? Nothing hackneyed! Now he comes to the palace episode. A corner lot, out where, like the gods, he can overlook the entire park system; and — this will appeal to you, Llandaff — he offers prizes for the interior decoration. I got wind of it, and went to ask for an interview. Met him going out. He's the embodiment of chivalry, Western chivalry. He believes in The Sex. He would give me an interview, yes, a dozen; but he could n't think of putting me to the trouble of coming again. He would come to me. I made an appointment for to-night."

Margaret had been thinking, and having been patiently sulky, she wanted to atone.

"Do come, Laura," she said; "you shall have the den."

But when the problematic visitor arrived, they were all assembled in the larger room; and Laura, from some haziness of understanding, or perhaps the sense that amusement lurked in numbers, brought him in

there. He was a short, stout man, with close mustache and honest eyes.

She named him to the others.

"Pleasant evening," he announced, looking about him with great friendliness.

"This is an interview, you know," said Laura. "Remember that anything you say may be used against you."

He smiled at her indulgently. She was "women-folks," and therefore to be admired. He did believe in *The Sex*.

"I'll bear it in mind. I've been interviewed before. Never by a lady, though. Easy enough matter. There's nothing I can't tell except one or two little turns in the market." At that he looked knowing, as a man proud of a diversion but new to him.

"I was interested in Mr. Brownell's new house," said Laura blandly, "and so was the 'Telephone.' You know — or you may not — that he has offered some prizes for interior decoration."

Amusement ran over the doctor's face.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I heard something about it to-day. Seaton — one of our artists, you know, Mr. Brownell — showed me the circular."

"Like it?" asked Brownell, lifting one leg over the other and beginning to nurse his knee.

"Very original! very!"

"I wrote that circular myself," asserted the visitor, looking at them in turn with a challenging frankness. "I brought a handful to-night," he added, smiling at Laura. "Thought you might like to copy."

But Laura had the circular; for that reason she wanted the inner spirit of the man who wrote it.

"Would you mind telling us about it?" she asked. "Your idea, as I understand, is to encourage American art?"

"My idea is to encourage everything American," said Brownell, in a voice raised to the oratorical level. "America for Americans! I say it, and I always have said it. Why, I go over to France, and I see their gallery full of new pictures, painted by home talent. I see studios where they learn, and our men flocking over in gangs. Why don't we have studios? Why don't we have schools, — the best schools in the world? I tell you, it's the artists' own fault. They've got themselves to thank. I don't blame them. Nothing whatever against them, as a class. They're not business men, that's all. We get a tariff that protects their industry, and what do they do? They fight it, tooth and nail. Yes, sir, tooth and nail!"

"But really, you know" — said Llandaff, speaking from such evident distaste that Laura interrupted him.

"And so, Mr. Brownell," she pursued sweetly, "as I understand, you mean to have your new house not only a model of beauty, but a monument of American art?"

"Precisely! Exactly! You've hit it on the head. I'm going to have a picture gallery, and when it's done, I'm going to fill it. There won't be any of your dead seamstresses, with charcoal smoking in the corner. They're going to be good straight American work: Old Oaken Bucket, Mother's Doughnuts, Path Down the Lane, Driving the Cows. You know!"

Doctor Milbanke had been looking at him from a

genuine kindness. He saw the integrity of the feeling lying at the bottom of that bluff rhetoric. Miss Milbanke, too, smiled a little, in her way of easing social strains. It was never hard for her to love the world and to believe in it.

"Yes, Mr. Brownell," she said. "I know what you mean. It does you credit."

He still directed his attention to Laura, but she noted how well the interview was proceeding without her, and leaned back, playing with the tassel of her gown. Llandaff, as he looked at her, felt his heart quicken at the harmony of her lines. She had an heroic pose.

"That 's my picture gallery," continued Brownell. "Then I 'm going to have a big room, half the size of the house. That 's my banqueting-hall. It 's to be decorated, walls and ceiling, something like the Capitol at Albany: only a better job or I don't accept it. Now I 've offered — You say you 've seen the circular?" he added, turning to the doctor. "What do you think of my offer?"

"Munificent!" said Doctor Milbanke, and meant it.

"I thought so. That prize is for designs. Only American artists compete."

"Who awards the prize?" asked Llandaff satirically.

"I do!" said Brownell, in innocence. "J. B. Brownell!"

Llandaff inadvertently chuckled, and Margaret made haste to speak.

"American artists only!"

"Yes, ma'am! American by birth. No Dagoes need apply."

Meanwhile Laura's attention was coming to its feet. She debated inwardly.

"I wonder" — she said, rising. "Llandaff, are those portfolios in the little room? No, don't get up. Mr. Brownell, I think you will like to see my cousin's photographs. Will you come this way?"

They went off into the den, and Llandaff knew he was not to follow. But his eyes pursued them, and his attention jealously turned that way. Margaret got up, and crossed over to a little stool by Miss Milbanke. There she sat down, and took one of the old lady's hands.

"Well, fairy godmother," said she, "what's the news?"

"Something that touches you," answered the doctor. "You know that society play they're bringing out at the Thespian?"

"Yes."

"Pinero gone mad, Laura says," volunteered Llandaff. "A clean crib, if ever there was one!"

"I don't know that; but it never will go with Kate Acres in the title rôle. I saw Greenfield, the manager, and said he, 'Margaret Leigh could have done that!'"

Joyous feeling rose in Margaret's face. She spoke breathlessly. "Does he remember me? Oh! I did n't know anybody did."

"Stupid child! we all remember. You promised, and then backed out. Some of us feel we hold your note of hand to this day. Honestly, Margaret, don't you ever repent?"

"What?"

"Cutting stick. Leaving the stage. Honestly!" Margaret considered for a moment. Then she

looked at Llandaff, and her eyes darkened. A flush rose in her cheeks.

"Never!" she exclaimed, as if it were an oath. She was confirming her loyalty by this public confession addressed to him alone. But Llandaff was not listening.

"Not a homesick moment?" insisted the doctor.
"Not a thrill?"

"Not one," said Margaret stoutly. This time she did not hesitate.

"Well, women are kittle cattle," sighed the doctor.
"Put the boot on the other foot. Llandaff, wake up and tell us: if a man sacrificed his beloved profession for matrimony, how long would it be before he slyly put out his hand and pulled it back again?"

"Suppose he gave up a beloved cigar!"

"Don't say how long!" put in Margaret. "Would he do it at all?"

"But it's quite different," said Miss Milbanke, patting Margaret's hand. "Is n't it, my dear?"

"'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'T is woman's whole existence.'

Where did I read that, James?"

"In a very immoral poet, named Byron. Don't recommend him to your protégées. It's something like those couplets of Pope. You can't deny them, and yet you kick. But this is a sore spot with me, Margaret. I never did get reconciled to your defection."

"I got reconciled very soon," she said, and this time Llandaff answered her smile. She had kept him ill at ease by her jarring moods. To-night she seemed like a younger self.

"What would you say," continued the doctor warily, "if Greenfield asked you to rehearse that part?"

Margaret's color was high. She probed his glance with eagerness. But she answered firmly, —

"Say? No, of course. I'm off the stage. But — but — doctor, did he tell you so?" Her voice sank entreatingly. Charles Reade would have said she whimpered.

"O woman! woman!" said the doctor, shaking a finger at her. "What unmitigated frauds you are! You pledge yourself to lentils, and meantime pray for flesh-pots. And we don't fathom you. I do; but that's because I'm clever. Yet even I can't read the woman at my door. I dare say Olivia here has myriads of ungodly longings while I think she's absorbed in catechisms and top-boots. Olivia, open your heart! Have you a suppressed desire for the beer and skittles you never get? Tell the truth!"

Miss Olivia looked at him in love and pride.

"I would n't, James, if I were you," said she admonishingly.

"I am not very much excited over the practical disabilities of women," mused the doctor. "They can do almost everything now but vote, and that's a doubtful bliss. But what does eat into me is their voluntary bondage. When a woman ties herself to the animal man, she insists on becoming not what she wants to be, but what she thinks he wishes. She mirrors him; she repeats him, like an infinite series of looking-glasses."

"Nonsense!" said Llandaff. "She's no such fool."

"Nonsense!" echoed Margaret, with a bright

glance at her old friend. "She does what makes her happiest."

"Now, there's Margaret! Llandaff whisked her off the stage because he had a man's inordinate desire to consume, and because there is a tradition that matrimony demands it. Her talent — I won't say genius; it's an overwrought word — ought to have turned and rent her before now. If it has n't done it yet, it will. Come, old lady, we must go."

At that moment, as Margaret went with them to get their wraps, Brownell and Laura returned from the inner room. He walked up to Llandaff, and put out his hand.

"Your cousin tells me you are an artist, sir," he said. "Pleased to make your acquaintance! Hope I did n't say anything to offend."

"Nothing whatever," returned Llandaff brusquely, giving the hand scant pressure. His hyper-sensitiveness made him hate the man at once; perhaps, too, Laura's evident air of trying to please. He had never seen in her a distinctively feminine cajolery; now she almost bridled.

"Mr. Brownell is coming again," she announced warningly. "We find we like the same things in art. May I show him your Greek casts?"

Llandaff gave a stiff assent, and Brownell said good-night. When she had seen him to the door, she came back and whispered rapidly to Llandaff, —

"You are going to get that man's prize money!"

"What?"

"Hush! they're coming. I'll tell you to-morrow. But you shall buy the Matlock house with it. Mark what I tell you!"

She left the room just as the Milbankes came to say good-night; and Llandaff had to give his mind to them. But though he did not understand her fully, she had opened a new chapter. As the Milbankes went down the stairs, Margaret, watching them over the balusters, yielded to an impulse, and ran after them.

"Doctor Milbanke!" she called. He turned and met her. "Doctor," she repeated, her eyes imploring him not to jeer, "does Mr. Greenfield remember me?"

"Upon my word! A few of us always will. We know you had the fire. I believe he'd give you an engagement to-morrow."

She laughed lightly, in a certain dramatic fashion hardly belonging to real life: it is too accented. Her eyes were shining. She put up her head a little.

"Thank you!" she said. "Good-night."

"Shall I tell him you'll take one?" asked the doctor chaffingly, and yet with meaning.

"Oh, no! but thank you just the same!"

"It is engender'd," murmured the doctor, as he put his sister into the carriage; and then on her remarking that she had not quite caught what he said, he replied cheerfully, "I was making aphorisms, Olivia. I said that genius is like 'woman's wit'; shut the door and 'it will out at the casement.'"

CHAPTER VI

MONEY AND ART.

Now J. B. Brownell made scrupulous calls upon Laura, who had discovered a remarkable community of interests between them. She bent herself to active flattery, fostering, with every word, his crass theories of the art likely to endow his country. Everything was flash and flare of independence gunpowder. He found himself talking to her of his pet plans, and forecasting their outcome, as he had never done to anybody since his young wife died.

"A fine woman!" he said to himself, rolling home in the carriage where he felt far less at ease than in a car. "I won't lose sight of her."

Laura was for some reason especially busy; and she put off Warrenner whenever he besought her to map out their fortune.

"Not now," she would say. "Give me time."

But one night she appeared at their door, ready to explain. She carried a book open at the page where the Greek tunic is described, with a careful diagram. She had dressed herself, according to the directions, in a fashion both simple and ennobling. A white shawl was draped about her, following the ancient folds. Her hair was wound in a classic knot. All the lines of her face and figure came out with fine assertiveness,

disguising the poverty of her color. She was entirely Greek.

"Oh!" breathed Margaret. She felt the dominating power of reminiscence and suggestion. This was not the incidental beauty of a pretty woman. It took hold on time; it led the eye, through shadowy vistas, to a noble past.

"Do look at this," said Laura practically. "In reference to the diagram, I mean. Is it right?"

"I don't know whether it's right," returned Margaret, "or what you mean by right. But it's beautiful."

Llandaff came from an inner room, and stood looking at her. His heart rose and his blood quickened. He saw her through some transport of sympathy keen enough to make her, through its own passion, altogether worthy.

"Now don't stand there!" she commanded. "Go and get a drawing-board, pencil — crayon — whatever you use. I'm to be sketched. You think it's nice, Margaret?"

"Nice! You're Minerva, a goddess, a Fate. You don't belong in every-day clothes."

"Then I'll have my picture took!" She threw herself on a divan, in an attitude of ease, letting one finger rest upon the book, while the other arm fell listlessly. "Come! come! Take me in my habit as I live!"

Llandaff got his things together, and seated himself, with an air of disturbed determination. She had hitherto spoken of his art only to decry it; now she seemed to be rescuing it from some niche where it had lain despised. He longed to justify himself and

it. He glanced at her with the quick look of the artist, and began, falling, as he went on, into an abstraction deeper still. Margaret sat by, gazing from one to the other, removed as they were by their silence. Laura seemed to be brooding. In reality she had lulled her mind in a way she had, whereby she got some of the benefit of sleep without its thriftlessness.

"I thought you did n't like my drawing," said Llandaff at last, unable to suppress the egoism of the hungry artisan.

"I said your color was worse!"

"Oh, come now!"

"Work away, little boy. Talk afterwards."

His hand moved with the swiftness and delicacy of the accustomed touch. Margaret, watching him in a maternal sympathy, guessed how much the moment was to him. Now, as always, she saw in him infinite possibilities. Should he fail, she would feel that, save for some uncounted circumstance, he might as easily have won. At the end of an hour, he threw down his pencil with a sigh.

"Ah! I can't do it. My hand has lost what cunning it had!"

"Give it to me," said Laura. She looked at it critically. "Not bad! Not bad at all! I've an idea that foot is out of drawing. Never mind, though. You'll have to supply a bare one in a sandal. Now shall I tell you what you are to do?" She dropped the paper, and faced them, a smile pursing her lips. "You will get up a series of drawings: Poesy, Ceres, the arts, the industries. You will submit them to J. B., the Prince of Soap. He shall take them, and your fortune is made."

Llandaff recoiled, and threw himself back in his chair. He had the pride of his art, if not the mastery of it.

"No," he said. "No!"

"But I say yes!"

"I won't. It's *infra dig*."

"Indeed, I think so," said Margaret, and Llandaff wished she had not spoken. He repudiated support in a question of taste, especially touching his own trade.

"Oh, very well!" said Laura, raising her brows. "Just as you like. I was going to propose being your model. If you do work as good as this — why, there you are! Pitch in and get paid, that's all. His way of doing things is somewhat peculiar, but it's his way. You don't expect a liberal education in the man who cuts your meat — or makes your soap."

Llandaff was wavering. He thought he felt only the passionate gratitude which was her due; in reality the battle was won.

"At least, you are a good angel," he said.

"I'm a good model! And I'm not doing this for you. It is n't cousinly philanthropy; nor is it a suppressed love of millionaires. Llandaff, do you know that if you got that man's money, you could buy back the house — my house! — and keep it in the name? Does n't that move you?"

It moved Margaret.

"Oh, the house!" she murmured. It seemed to her that Laura had set up a fetish, and was infecting Llandaff with the same mad worship. A breath of their old free life in Paris swept over her; but it blew too keenly and brought pain.

Llandaff made swift decision; he yielded, without knowing it, to the stronger will. He met Laura's eyes, and, as if they compelled him, stretched out his hand.

"It's a bargain," he said. "I'll do what I can."

She clasped hands with him, and rose to go. Then, to make the situation complete, she trumped up some spurious enthusiasm for the present moment.

"He's coming to-morrow to look at some casts. He shall come next day to look at some more. He shall be fooled to the top of his bent, and we'll sell new lamps for old!" Llandaff winced, and she shifted her ground. "We'll turn ourselves loose in mythology. You shall sketch me till all the seas run dry. Have I good lines? Have I?"

"Adorable!"

"I'll be Niobe, Proserpina" —

He caught the infection. "Melpomene!"

"Juno, Minerva" —

"Ah, but Americanized! Pagans made aboriginal!"

She descended to earth, and left him floating.

"To-morrow I'll give you an hour," she said, "at four. We'll try my room. The afternoon light is better there. Meantime I'm bound for the opening of the Sailors' Home. Want to come along? We can talk it over by the way. Good-by, Margaret. The Home would n't amuse you, I suppose."

"No, thanks," said Margaret, with an unreal cheerfulness. She listened a moment to Laura's retreating steps. Then she ran to Llandaff, and laid her arms about his neck. She hid her face, and stood there, not crying, but shaking all over and passion-

ately desiring comfort. Llandaff put up his hand and stroked her cheek.

"What is it, child?" he asked kindly. "What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know! Perhaps I'm homesick!"

He put his cheek down on hers for a moment; then he unclasped her hands.

"There! you must let me go," he said gently, and she felt his impatience under that restraint. "You see these are not ordinary times for us, Margaret. You don't consider we have n't got a cent beyond that beastly twelve dollars a week. And suppose that fails? I don't believe they'd look at my stuff if Laura did n't doctor it occasionally. I must be poking round. I must have my eyes about me."

Margaret withdrew from him, and stood waiting while he got his great-coat. Her hands were clasped before her, to keep down their trembling; but her eyes were wet. She felt like a child whose only salvation is in some St. Christopher strong enough to lift and carry.

"I'll be good," she promised whimsically, as he took her by the chin and gave her a light kiss on either cheek.

"That's right," he said, relieved. Laura's step was on the stair, and he found himself glad to escape the uncertain weather within. At the door he turned back. "Margaret," he said, half irritated over what seemed to him an unnecessary situation, "life's a pretty serious thing, you know. I've all but lost my chance at it. We wasted too much time abroad. It's got to be made up."

Margaret stepped forward impulsively.

"Oh, I 'll be good, Llandaff," she promised again. "I will! I 'm good now!"

Llandaff waved his hand to her, and was gone. She stood listening to the steps until they ended in silence, and then threw herself face downward on a couch, and began to cry, as a woman can who abandons herself to grief, with the bitter recognition that nobody cares whether she cries or not. Margaret had, by unnoted steps, reached a condition of hysterical overthrow. She was much in the house, she was often alone; and the framework of her past life was still dissolving, leaving nothing to succeed it. Deprived of Llandaff's daily company and constant thought of her, she felt like a creature whose members are lopped and who bleeds with every breath. This, she sometimes thought, was the bewilderment of the insane. Morbid symptoms awakened in her, rousing fear and dread. Hatred was her daily guest; for, present or absent, Laura's face was ever before her, and she loathed it. She shrank from the woman's step, her voice. In walking, she feared to meet her and turned corners apprehensively, like one pursued. A creeping suspicion of her husband poisoned her blood, and in spite of reason, influenced her strongly. If he went out, she wondered whether he went to meet Laura, and then recoiled from her own folly; if he were absorbed, she sought the reason savagely. She cried in her sleepless nights; through the day also her nerves were quivering, and she beat about like a bird with a broken wing, not knowing the ways of flight, and sickening under the sun.

As she lay there, the poor victim of her grief, there

came a call at the bell. It was the condition of her sick state that she should anticipate evil; and on her way to the tube, she had a vision of Llandaff brought home dead or dying. It was Doctor Milbanke's voice, and having answered, there was no way but to see him. She bathed her face hastily, and turned down the light. But there was a quiver in her voice, and the doctor knew.

"Llandaff at home?" he asked, though he had seen him at the corner, and come round with a sudden determination to find Margaret alone. He had something to tell her; yet after all he was not sure it could be told.

"He's gone to write up something or other," she said, seating herself with feminine cleverness, her back to the light. "We are journalists now."

"I know. Is he well? Does this air agree with him — this raucous, grinding east wind of the world?"

"Oh, I think so! He's very much interested in everything. Very well!"

The doctor decided that this was not the time to speak.

"How are you, Margaret?" he asked gently. "A little homesick? just a little?"

"Just a little!" said Margaret, nodding gravely.

"Boulevards, and cafés, and Sundays at Fontainebleau?"

"Yes. France, and old things, old ways! O doctor, I do so hate changes!" She spoke with a betraying bitterness.

"So do I, so does everybody. But we've got to have them. Do you notice that, if you get into a rut, the immortal gods send some inferior potentate to

shoulder you out? That's seems to be one of the conditions of their system."

Margaret felt, for the moment, the serenity of one storm-driven to the confessional. Surely she might lean upon this kindly wisdom, and while she challenged it, keep her own grief hidden.

"But if things are to be continually changing," she hesitated, "there won't be any permanency, any constancy, any" —

"Very little," agreed the doctor, "in the outward life. Margaret, let's take care to look at the substance of things, not their form."

She was silent, and he went on, feeling his way.

"Take yourself! Suppose you have a great ambition, a great love, a great ideal. You are constant to it, but your constancy assumes many phases with your growth, with its growth. Be pliable, Margaret, can't you? Yield a little, and accommodate yourself to the form of things."

Margaret was breathing quickly. He had distinct help for her, and she longed to take it. The moment seemed large enough to admit of perfect truth. She felt no temptation to violate the loyalty of fact; that was unnecessary.

"But there are some things we have a right to," she said. "They are ours."

"Are they?" asked the doctor sadly. "Not always! at least, the form of them."

"But some people don't change. You don't!"

"Margaret," said the doctor slowly, "I am an old man, older than I seem, because I determined years ago that, if I had got to live, I would keep up my interest in the game. I would fulfill the law to its

utmost tittle. You would say my life has been consistent. I practiced medicine, and gained some small reputation. My wife died, and I did not marry again. You say I was constant to that one woman. And I think I was! but, Margaret, I have seen two sweet faces since her death that made me long to take them home and force my desert into bloom. There! you draw back. I knew you would. You women are angelic, and sometimes you are hard. You are incapable of understanding illusion — illusion! A man knows what it is. But, Margaret, I didn't do it. Why? Because I knew in the bottom of my soul that I did love that woman with all there is of me. I know I love her to-day as much — yes, by God! a thousand times better, than I did when I kissed her brown hair and shut her coffin lid. And if there is any other life, well — 'I shall but love her better after death.'"

"And yet," began Margaret tremulously, and stopped.

"And yet I could see a rose was red, or guess how many candle lights might make a sun. I could, Margaret, I could! I met a woman ten years ago this summer, and my heart went out to her. I thought of her sitting at my table, I saw her face light up when I came home. I said, 'Perhaps I can reconstruct my life!' I had a moment of youth, hope — and illusion. I went into the woods to think it over, and I had a queer experience. I walked along, kicking the leaves and communing. But not with myself! That was the strange part of it. I realized that my mind was putting questions, and waiting for the answers; and suddenly it seemed to me that my dear

love was with me, and we were thinking it out together. 'I can't,' I said, 'I can't.' And curiously, while I said it, I saw she would forgive me if I did. She knew it was a phase. But I could n't do it; for you see I did love my dear love. Nobody else! All the immortal possibilities of existence were bound up in her. She was my highwater mark. If there was one chance in millions of her being alive — well, I could n't disappoint her, that's all."

A silence fell between them. Margaret had always liked him heartily, but now she felt a nearness to him hitherto unknown.

"I wonder how you lived," she said at last.

His face contracted. Perhaps he would not have answered at another time; but, seeing her need, it was impossible to repulse her.

"I don't quite know," he said. "If she had been a little less noble, I should have been less resolved. But just as soon as I got my grip in the least, I tried to remember how much life meant to her — my life. Like all of you, she suppressed herself, and deified the foolish male she might have ruled. Well, I tried to pretend she would have news of me. I got up little expedients to live by. I tried to do the things that would make her proud, then the things that would make her glad. I devoted myself to medicine till my eye and hand began to fail me. There was compensation. There always is. I grew to love my daily life. You know we are tender toward the crutch we lean on."

"I think you were constant!"

"Then you are a progressive woman. But you see you are looking at it now after the lapse of time,

and from my point of view. You would n't think a woman constant if she deflected for a day, an hour. They're pretty pathetic, Margaret, these two diverse creatures of different instincts, training, inheritance, made by the tyranny of nature to live together. But let's try to understand each other all we can. It won't be fully, at the best." He got up, and took her hand. Then he drew her forward, probing her face with kindly eyes. "Sleeping badly, Margaret?" he asked. "Not sleeping at all? What if I should give you a little powder? It won't do you any harm, and you'll get oblivion out of it."

"Ah, that's what I want!" said Margaret quickly; and he took two folded papers from his case. She did not know that they had been put there in anticipation of a more tragic need.

"Go out of doors," he said, as he stood on the stairs, and she leaned above him, her pale face dimly lighted by its tear-washed eyes. "Walk; run into the park and snowball! Look at the sky. Forget your dragons."

But as he went down the stairs, his heart grew heavy and his face contracted. His errand was not accomplished. He had come to give her evil news; and finding her so little able to bear it, the inevitable day was still put off. He had acted the coward, and he saw no possibility of being anything else.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLAGUE SPOT

THEN in an upper room of the house on Merry-mount Street began what seemed to Margaret, at least, a comedy. Day after day Laura draped herself in some noble fashion, and Llandaff sketched with a hand doubtful of its own daring. They talked interminably of pose, detail, mythological sequence, and Laura seemed to brush her work aside, coming home in haste to an absorbing task. Margaret had not lost a jot of faith in her husband's capabilities; but possibly through jealous irritation, she suspected the thing as an unreal issue. So, wishing with all her heart she might be generous, she became coldly silent, and held herself aloof. But no one noted her withdrawal. Llandaff was too absorbed even to remember that he had still to earn his twelve dollars a week, and Laura was forever reminding him of the hour for copy. It seemed to be continually on the stroke. "O Lord!" he groaned, and she refused him sittings until the inevitable should be accomplished. Then, rebounding to that dearer toil, his heart rose and he labored in a kind of delirium, not to be understood save by those who know the constraining of the brush and pen. He had never done such almost admirable work. It seemed as if his model's stronger spirit had imposed on him the bonds of larger knowledge and

trained his fingers to precision. No bare intelligence alone had wrought that witchery. The physical splendor of the creature, her overpowering magnetism, filled the room and weighted the air he breathed. In spite of what women called her personal ugliness she gave forth that nameless emanation more potent than line and substance. This she neither treasured nor despised, save as a stock in trade. She did recognize it with a baldness crude enough to have killed her charm in the eyes of a man who would fain have what he desires ideally desirable. But even the sensitive man would not have guessed her cold self-estimate; unless, indeed, he had no wares for her. As Llandaff worked, all the illusions summoned by his sanguine heart crowded about her, like the Graces, and crowned her with an added charm. He was dominated, he thought, by the womanly principle, not, he would have sworn, by a woman. But Margaret caught in his eyes the blind look of seeking love, and turned away, undone. More and more she stayed by herself, leaving them to their chosen solitude, and at each withdrawal she bled anew.

"Oh, why did n't we do this before!" muttered Llandaff, snatching an hour's work one waning afternoon.

Laura sat holding a harp, her head leaned low upon it, her powerful arms making transverse curves across the strings.

"Don't talk," she murmured. "Work!"

"I do work. I never pitched in so in my life. Sometimes I think it's really you, working through my hand. Laura, you're a great creature."

"Am I?" returned she sweetly, and while he got

up to push the curtain wider, she gave a generous, soul-satisfying yawn. "O my God!" she said rapidly to herself, "the patience of women! One with her lover, her husband, one with her children — all for something! The blind, base, inherited patience of things that rule by fraud!"

Llandaff came back and she smiled at him.

"J. B. called last night," said she expansively, "the arbiter of our destiny."

Llandaff frowned over his work.

"He comes too often," said he. "Stay long? Of course he did. That sort of animal never knows when to go."

"Three hours, by Shrewsbury clock. Brought me orchids."

"He makes me tired. I can't hear you talk about him. Gives me paralysis. Submit work to that money-bag? It's too farcical."

"Submit work to him? Yes, and come into fame and fortune at one *coup*. Temper that absurd pride of yours. Benvenuto Cellini knew the taste of patronage; Michelangelo, too, I believe. Remember that and be humble."

Llandaff reddened; the sound of a great name under his heaven made him big with vanity and love of things to be.

"I hear the name of gods taken in vain," came Brandon's voice from the hall. "May I come in?"

"If you don't jar our atmosphere," Laura warned him. "We've mixed it with great care and some expenditure."

"You have to sing 'Sweet By-and-By' for the invocation of spirits." He perched himself on a stool,

and regarded Warrener rather satirically. But not his work: he believed in the courtesies of the arts. The situation did seem to him slightly picturesque, but he had seen too much farce in the course of living to exclaim over it. He had his story to relate.

"The Minerva Club is having a jolly row. I was told on condition that I did n't tell — in print. They've declared a war of the tongues, Greek and anti-Greek, college and anti-college. But the silver lining is that somebody has said a good thing. Miss Beaman, who spent three years on the star-fish (that's what they say: I don't know whether dissecting, or being nourished thereby — or whether it's an island), well, she thought tweedledum was exceedingly like tweedledee, and that a scientific lady can learn Greek by rote. But she broke down at rehearsal, and was not only corrected but treated with spurn by a young university girl. 'What is a college woman?' demanded Miss Beaman, in tears. 'One who has studied four years and never 'studied since.' I thought that moderately good, myself."

"Yes, moderately; but what do they propose doing?"

"They want to shelve 'Antigone' and find a new play — altogether new. Meanwhile time keeps on galumphing and they're more or less distraught. Anne Gilroy, my cousin, who has believed in me since I was a youth of promise, she says, says she, 'O Bayard! you write us a play. Do, now! I know you can.'"

"So you can, or something as good as a play. Set to at once. Let them wrangle a fortnight more, and then, when their walls are crumbling, take in your

work. Say to Mrs. Gilroy, 'There! don't betray me. I prefer to be *incog*.' She'll come down with a round sum and go panting in to them as a patron of the arts. I know her claptrap. She'll keep your name in abeyance and they'll swallow the thing whole. 'How like Ibsen!' I hear it now."

Warrener was holding his hand a little, and frowning more and more. Brandon had broken that atmosphere wherein, alone with his lady, he could feed the ecstasy of silent thought. He turned his back on the utilitarian side of her; it was like the coarse hand of toil.

"I could n't do that," said Brandon moodily. "I might dramatize something. Perhaps not even that."

"Why not 'Francesca'? Take Boker's bombast and turn it into English. They'd never know it for a crib."

"Gammon! The critics would. I'm a critic myself."

"There's a story in 'Temple Bar.'" Now she was interested, and her arm dropped from its place. Llandaff laid down his pencil in despair. "Light comedy" —

"They don't want comedy," interposed Brandon. "Heavy tragedy, modern hysteria's their only wear, and don't you mistake it."

"You're tired, I am afraid," said Warrener impatiently, and Laura was recalled. She got up and shook herself free.

"No, not tired, but I can't sit any longer. Cræsus is coming for me, and I've barely time to dress. Run away, little boys."

Brandon disappeared at once, whistling thoughtfully

as he reached the hall ; but Llandaff still delayed. He looked an anger disproportioned to any present cause.

“Is Brownell coming here for you ?” he demanded.

“Yes, my lords and gentlemen,” returned Laura, pushing a sofa into place, and giving the room a comprehensive look, “and with a carriage, one that smells to heaven. He once read somewhere how the rich and great loll on scented cushions, and his are stuffed with orris — musk and patchouly, too — till the spirit faints at it. Run along, child. I’ve no time to waste.”

Llandaff stood his ground, choked by an emotion he did not define. His face contracted.

“I wish you would n’t, Laura,” he said at length.

She glanced at him. Time was failing, and jealousy must be appeased. She swept rapidly toward him, and standing at arm’s length, laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“O Llandaff ! Llandaff !” she murmured with that maternal chiding born first of love alone, “what a child you are ! Can’t you bow the knee to Baal ? Can’t you let me bow it for you ?” She looked long and confidently into his eyes, and he abandoned himself to an irresponsible joy and trust. With a quick motion he turned his head and put his lips to her wrist. Instantly it was gone, as lightly as a bird, and he fell back a step, now not looking at her. He called her his cousin, yet she was as strange to him as any creature newly met. Something intoxicating and significant had happened. Laura shut the door upon him, and stood for an instant looking at her hand. She brushed it thoughtfully with a fold of her dress before turning away from the spot. It was for

no formulated reason, but she had a slight and curious distaste for it.

Llandaff went down the stairs and into his own room. He felt not only the elation of the present moment, but an added freedom because Margaret must be gone for her daily walk. All the impulses of an untrained life, all his unsatisfied passion for the work he had not yet accomplished, swept together in a mounting wave of which Laura was the glory. The walls about him expanded, lifted. He saw the haze of a horizon too illimitable to be defined. With a man's forgetfulness of what has gone before and lives no longer, he did not even recall the memory of dead sensations for comparison with this. He held the doubtful gift of a manifold rejuvenescence, and if he had met his wife that instant he could have looked upon her face with alien eyes. A new planet had swung into his ken. It glowed entrancingly within the misty air; he saw upon it the richest possibilities of bloom and fruitage.

Entering the parlor he stopped, with a momentary recoil. Doctor Milbanke was sitting there over a book; and the doctor knew he had come at the wrong time.

"I wanted to see you," he began. "Margaret told me I might wait. She was just going out and I would n't detain her. You don't mind?"

"Delighted," said Llandaff perfunctorily. He blew aside that little bubble of joy to keep for solitude. But it held, all the shining sphere and rainbow coloring. Still his eyes shone with their inner fire, and the doctor looked keenly at him.

"It is n't journalism," he remarked wisely. "Men don't get drunk on that."

Warrener flung himself on the sofa.

"No," he said, laughing, though he shaded his eyes as if they might betray him; "not telling how to pound clam shells and put pepper in hen food till hot weather. I have an agricultural department."

"How under heaven do you manage it?"

"Oh," began Llandaff, and then stopped. He wanted to say, "Laura manages it." She did, in the way of suggestion, and clever editing. He never made allowance for her accumulated stock of dreary facts, and even when it came to hen food, she seemed omniscient. There was a little pause, and the doctor began abruptly, with the air of a man who has made up his mind to speak, though at the wrong moment.

"Warrener, I've come to interfere."

Llandaff sat upright, and then lay back and gathered a pillow under his head. He laughed nervously for the relief of second thought.

"I know," he said, "the plague spot again. Specialist! change of air! cod liver oil, even! That may not be the precise tippie, but I mention it as the nastiest."

"You have the gist of it," said the doctor, relieved after his plunge. "I really should n't interfere, having done it once, if I did n't feel a responsibility about you and Margaret. You are such children!"

"Don't speak to her," said Llandaff swiftly. "I won't be coddled."

"Then let me speak to you. Nobody has any business to fly in the face of nature as you are doing. You behave like an irrational boy. Don't, Llandaff!"

Warrener softened under the rebuking tone.

"I am much obliged, you know," he said, "but you overestimate the thing. That's the way with you doctors. You see all the world blue — cancer, consumption, whatever. If I let the thing alone, how soon will it wipe me out?"

"I don't say it will wipe you out at all. But you must n't play tricks!"

"That's exactly it!" cried Llandaff triumphantly. "You won't give nature a chance. Why, doctor, I'm awfully well."

"I know it; but that's irrelevant. Your being well is enormously in your favor, so far as the operation goes. It does n't promise any cessation to the growth."

Llandaff had become a shade paler.

"An operation!" he muttered uneasily. "Nonsense! give the thing a chance to go away. When it comes to that, give it a chance to spread. I suppose you'd just as lief sew up an ell as an inch. Frankly, now, doctor, don't you sometimes exaggerate? Have n't you thought a man was at death's door, and seen him turn round and march back again?"

"Yes."

"There!"

The doctor got up and approached him.

"Take off your collar, please," he said. "Let me see."

Warrener rose also, but he waved off the attack laughingly.

"No! no!" said he. "I'm awfully obliged, but I'll be hanged if I will. It makes me nervous. Come, doctor, don't be a harpy. Those bunches are innocent enough. Why, I've told you the first one

came from a blow. What on earth do you think they are?"

"I don't think. I am only sure that bunches of any sort are better outside the human system than in. Therefore I advise you, as a friend, to go into some hospital and have them removed."

"A hospital? Good Lord! and leave my hen food? Can't afford it."

"If you had the slightest regard for me," said the doctor impatiently, "you'd let me" —

"Ah, I know, doctor!" said Llandaff, putting out his hand. "But I did that before, at Amboise, and you're not paid yet. You will be, though. No, I shall stay right here on this spot, and fight it out. I'm not in danger; honestly I'm not. If I play my cards well, I shall see threescore."

Doctor Milbanke began shaking himself into his coat.

"What cards?" he asked rather sadly. "Rebellion? revolt? Nature's a very just goddess, my boy, and a terrible. You may throttle her, but you can't hold."

"Ah, well! then I'll try staring her down."

The door opened, and Margaret came in, dispirited. The doctor turned his professional gaze that way, and saw how little good the biting air had done her. Reddened with the cold, she seemed withered rather than heartened by it, and though she smiled at the two men, it was only from a dull anticipation. This, like all moments, was but an interval between one weary thought and another.

"I hate this kind of thing," said the doctor violently, looking from husband to wife. "Get over it,

you two. Run down South, roll in the sand, and send me some orange-blossoms."

Now Margaret laughed.

"But we 're not ill," she said in her turn. "Are we, Llandaff? We 're just getting acclimated. You must have patience with us."

"So I shall, so I shall," owned the doctor dryly. He buttoned his coat to his chin, and shook hands with them both in silence. Margaret, drawing off her gloves, stood by the window and watched him down the street.

"Did he think you were in the dumps, too, Llandaff?" she asked thoughtfully.

"Much doctoring hath driven him mad," responded Warrener. Then he went back to his dreams, and felt warm at the heart, at finding his bubble unbroken.

He was very silent at dinner, and Margaret, glancing at him, shrank from the abstracted ardor of his gaze. He seemed very far from her; very gentle, too, but as if a film lay between them, tangible enough for everlasting separation and yet cruelly transparent. She felt with him that he had found new worlds; he might rejoice, but she was terrified and caught her breath, longing dumbly for some home of the spirit where she might rest a little before going on.

CHAPTER VIII

CAROLS AND COPPER

WILLIAM DEANE, the Poet, lay in bed watching a ray of wintry light upon his curtain; then, from want of thought, he began to sing. Christmas-tide was drawing on, and he sang, "I saw three ships," spurring a husky tenor, and improvising the tune. Every breath of suggestion greatened, for him, into a wind from the land of promise; syllables were full-fledged carols. He got up and dressed, two well-regulated acts usually to be avoided at that hour from motives of consistency; then he set forth on the trail of the house members, and was aggrieved at not finding them. Hidden in his innocent consciousness hung the picture of a world only waiting for his arrival; and now reality was blotting it out. He wandered into the basement, slippered and sulky, and Mrs. Bebington set him down by her stove, plying him with tea the while she dispatched the little maid, hot-foot, to make his bed.

"Praise my heavenly Father!" said Mrs. Bebington piously; "for once, this house is made up at ten o'clock. I wish such beds might never be tumbled."

The clans failed to assemble until five, and then speedily separated again, each to his own way; save Margaret, at whose feet Willie sat down and poured out grief.

"I've been up a whole day, waiting for them to sing carols. A whole day! I never knew anything so absolutely disconcerting, so counter to the universe. Do they do this often?"

Margaret laughed.

"Every day," she said. "Every single day. We could n't all stay in bed, you know."

"I can't say about that," returned Willie wisely. "If not, why not? Can you sing carols?"

"I can sing a little." Margaret had a ballad voice, sweet and clear. "'How should I your true love know?'" she sang, as if she drained a cup to olden days. Those days had never ceased sending their reminiscent messages.

"Why should n't we sing carols?" suggested Willie, — "you and I?"

"Very well. Where's your book?"

"There's one in Brandon's room. I saw it."

He plunged upstairs, and presently returned with a collection. Margaret sang faithfully, glad of something to do. Willie's ambition knew no limits. His willing tenor almost burst its cerements, and then blossomed, without warning, into a passionate tremolo.

"There!" he cried, "how do you like that?"

Margaret hesitated.

"Adds expression, don't you think?" he besought her.

"Ought n't it to be simpler, perhaps?" suggested Margaret, denying herself a smile. "Expression, as you say, but not quite so much?"

"You're right! you're right!" he agreed, and true to art, put his ambition away to pine.

Teresa, in passing, heard them, and knocked timidly at the door.

"Now we 're ashamed," said Margaret. "We were amusing ourselves, but you can sing."

"I can sing a little to-night, I 'm quite sure," said the girl. "Let me try. Only with you, though." Her voice met Margaret's in a lovely unison. She knew where it would falter, but it soothed her heart to strive a little, in freedom from exacting intellects. Margaret, who was not demonstrative, put out her hand and laid it over the little one holding the book.

"Oh," she said, with some wonder, "you 're an artist!" It seemed to her the more amazing that a voice like that, rich and full of power, should inhabit so delicate a frame. Teresa turned to her gladly. She was starved for praise. The black leaped into her eyes, and made the pupils wide.

"Then," she said simply, "let 's sing some more."

And Willie, magnificently unconscious of being himself like the raven, "out of tune and harsh," directed them with a child-like patronage, and liked his little game.

The others came as the evening wore on, and after some scoffing dropped into the determined scheme of things. Brandon had a deep voice, true as his touch on all the arts, Llandaff blushed over a light tenor, and Laura, swearing she never sang a note in her life, piped a little and did no harm. Willie mounted a cricket, and conducted with fantastic vigor. He put his head on one side, beat time with a piece of kindling wood, and forgot, in sheer delight, to sing.

"See that shockheaded youth expand," commented Brandon to Laura. "Poet," he called, during a rest mercifully bestowed, "who were you before you were yourself?"

Willie seized upon the bait; it would be thorny in the throat, but he cared not.

"That 's precisely what I was thinking," said he. "Brandon, you 've hit it. Who was I? Not Liszt! I was born before he died."

"A person of your calibre could n't have existed through that interval without an ego," suggested Brandon gravely.

"That 's not impossible, but it is improbable. Especially as I remember things that happened when I was under eight months old — no, ten. I can see plainly a particularly gorgeous purple I noticed at that time. It was my nurse's company gown. She stood in the sun. But whose soul inhabits me to-night? I could have written 'Adelaïde'! I could sing it!"

"Don't!" cried Brandon, in access of mortal anguish. "O unquenchable fount, dry up!"

"The other day you were Charles II.," said Llandaff.

Willie bestowed on him a sapient look, implying their common capacity for seeing "a church by daylight."

"That was a mood," he nodded wisely. "Only a mood. I am really all music, poesy and song!"

Strangely enough, for the Republic seldom carried a unanimous vote, everybody took to the carols, and for a week rehearsed religiously, though Teresa, in the routine of a dull employment, proved the one uncertain factor. Willie conducted passionately, clad sometimes in a yellow bath robe, as suited to the atmosphere, and often in his cloak of many capes, wherein he panted with heat and æsthetic emotion. But whatever he might wear, his locks were rumpled and his

forehead knit. The others, led by Margaret, sank into acquiescence.

"Don't make fun of him," she whispered once to Brandon. "He does so like his little game!"

Then came Christmas Eve, when they assembled in Laura's room for Yule log and wassail. Like a big family, they had determined to give no gifts; and being poor, had started a little bank in a box, to buy their Christmas green. The room was hung like a bower with winter garlanding. The candles stood ready, and a leafy fragrance filled the air. Margaret slipped her arm through her husband's, and put her cheek down on his shoulder. She was almost happy. The dramatic promise of the moment overlapped the future, and made life possible again. The aching remembrance of other years, hardly yet gone, rose to her lips, and she felt that pain of being which is keen enough to be called joy. Willie had gone out to wash his hands from the stickiness of pine boughs, but that was sufficient to tilt his planet into another track. He came in gasping with eagerness.

"Oh, I say! I've got the most gorgeous plan, simply the most gorgeous! What for are we going to waste our carols on these dull walls?"

"'T is but good taste misplaced,'" sang Brandon.

"Why don't we," said Willie slowly, giving them time, "why don't we just toddle up the avenue, and sing them to Philistia? O my eye! the rich and great!"

"They'll toss you coppers," said Llandaff.

"Which I shall take," asseverated Willie. "I have one collar in the world. Here it is. Think what it would be to me to stand square with my washerlady.

Not that I love her more, but that she ceases coming."

For some reason, Laura was pleased. She brought out a Shaker cloak, and drew the hood over her head.

"Disguised!" cried she. "Margaret, where's that cape of yours with a Capuchin hood? You boys can wear mackintoshes, and mufflers or something, can't you?"

"You don't mean you'd do it?" said Llandaff.

Nobody thought for a moment of accrediting Willie with anything but the crackling of thorns under a pot; but now the idea took form and color.

"Come! come!" said Laura impatiently. "I see copy before me. Excellent article for the 'Telephone:' 'The Mummers,' written by one who followed them. Signed 'Observer.'"

"I have an impression you've got to take out a license to disturb the peace," remarked Brandon. "How do you propose evading the arm of the law?"

"With the limbs of Satan," said Laura promptly. "'Police'! he calls — the bloated householder. We dodges round the corner. The only one not to escape will be I, being on a generous model and moving galleon-wise. Oh, come on!"

Margaret was laughing. Her face crinkled with fun, and even Laura, who thought her a colorless creature given over to brooding, looked upon her and smiled. None of them save Llandaff had seen her untroubled, and so none of them had really seen her at all.

"Oh, come! come!" she echoed. "I'll bring my cape."

The men exchanged the glance of victims who fore-

cast the event and are ready for either end. Silently they buttoned themselves into their coats. We do not concur, said their action, we do not countenance. We submit.

The Guardsman, who was placidly smoking in a corner, got his hat with the rest. Brandon stopped at the door, and devoted one look of regret to the joys that were not to be. He had meant, that evening, to smoke his pipe and sit at peace with all the world save, perhaps, the Poet.

"But see here," he remarked, "we're leaving out Hamlet. Where's the Child? She's carrying about the only voice in the Republic. She has absconded with it."

"I'll see to that," said the Guardsman quietly. "Tell me where you're going, and I'll bring her along."

"Where do we go, Laura?" called Llandaff, over the balusters. And Willie answered for her, —

"Corner of Leamington."

St. John ran downstairs behind them, and turned through Quincy Square. He knew the way for her to come. This was not the first night he had gone for her, with an honest exaggeration of her timidity and the unwisdom of her being out alone. Teresa was catching at the makeshifts of a livelihood. Just now she read aloud to an invalid across the square; and he walked up and down in the shadow, afraid of the others coming to sweep her into their midst. The Guardsman had no idea of allowing her to sing in the open air on a frosty night. He knew a little about the physical basis of song, having previously heard much professional patter; and the marred fragments of

Teresa's gift seemed to him ineffably precious. The others went hilariously down the street; their voices floated back, in waning gusts, and died away. A door opened, his door, the one he looked at now, even when he passed it by day, with some inexplicable interest. A little black-clad figure fittet out. He saw her glance up and down the hill, and his heart gave a responsive beat. Did she remember he had waited for her there before? She was a child, and it seemed very sweet of her. He crossed and called to her.

"Ah!" she said, with a satisfied little note, and gave him her hand, although they had met that morning. These were two lonesome people, and their minds were turning very fast, the one to the other, with the joy of new kindliness and understanding.

"Now see here," said the Guardsman, "before you go home. The others have posted up the avenue to sing carols. Do you want to go?"

The tone said, "You don't want to go!" and Teresa, having exclaimed, "What fun!" added meekly,

"No, I don't want to go."

"So I thought. Now have you had anything to eat?"

"My supper."

"Enough?"

"Yes, two eggs. Honestly!"

"Very well. Now suppose we follow on, and listen, a block away."

"Oh, lovely!" said Teresa. After all, she was to have her fairing.

"I told them I'd bring you, but of course I knew you would n't sing."

"I'm afraid they'll wait for me."

"Oh, no, they won't," said the Guardsman wisely. "Not with Deane to the fore. He'd sing the song of Moses, and expect people to find it groves."

"Groves?"

"Don't you remember how John Chivery sat out in the back yard among the linen, and called it groves? Dickens, you know."

Teresa assented vaguely, feeling very young. The Guardsman had moved in the era of Boz. Brandon said it was his only idealism. Teresa, on the other hand, was of a decade which, save at a cold degree of removal, "knew not Joseph."

He was right. They had not waited. Presently the two lingerers heard "God rest ye!" and saw, almost at the moment, a curtain raised at an upper window and clustering heads. The children were still awake, because it was Christmas Eve.

"It really sounds very well," said St. John.

Willie's voice dominated. In the mounting enthusiasm of the moment there was danger of his tremolo. Teresa felt it, like a premonition, and shuddered.

"Cold?" asked the Guardsman, and she laughed.

"No," she said, "nervous. Out here, you see, they have n't any sort of curb for the Poet. They can't put him down."

"Oh, trust Brandon! He'll smash him, if worst comes to worst."

The carol died with a lingering note from Willie, as if he would not part so soon. The waits proceeded. A window came up, a tiny parcel was tossed into the street. Willie dived for it, and encountered Llandaff, who stooped also. A whoop of joy rose from the revelers. They were drunken with success.

"Jove!" muttered the Guardsman, "they've got it. This is better than I thought."

They moved slowly on behind, and halted while, under a gas lamp, the singers paused to count their spoils. It was a vivid picture, once you could translate it, of hooded head and muffling cloak brought out against the snow.

"By the Lord!" called Willie, in great excitement, "twenty-seven cents, and mostly coppers! 'Ow long 'ave they been a-savin' up for this 'ere little treat?' Oh, come on! This is the proudest moment of my life! I'm a wage-earner. Labor and capital have met. Carols and copper have kissed each other."

They had varying fortunes, the two witnesses following throughout. Often they sang to most unheeding ears. Three times in all were windows opened and pence bestowed. Once a footman appeared, and asked with a plentiful lack of h's if they would please move on.

"'Ere's a quarter," he said most kindly, "but there's a musicale inside."

Brandon, accepting the quarter, offered him a magnificent bow.

"Ah," said he regretfully, "but we're very musical outside. My dear sir, are you the master of this house? If you are—and from your dignified address and swelling port I conclude that you can be nothing less—let me inform you that we, for a sum too small to name and a cold collation in the back alley, could furnish you with any midsummer madness you might fancy. The gentleman at my right" (Willie bowed with startling promptitude) "is the Prime Minister of England. This in the cloak is Mistress Hannah

More, and I myself am no other than Guy, formerly of Warwick and now of the West End."

The footman cast one comprehensive look up and down the avenue ; but no guardian being near, he marched discreetly home again, chanted as a "jolly good fellow."

"Wagner!" gasped Willie at the end. "What do you say? I'm equal to it. I could take you right along."

"There, little boy, you've had enough," said Brandon kindly, turning him about. "Come, children, lead your brother home."

"Oh, I must help them if they try again," implored Teresa. "He's hopeless now. You see his voice is gone, and he does n't know it."

"But you don't want to?" said the Guardsman masterfully.

"No," said Teresa, and thought she meant it.

Perhaps they two were having the best of the game. Teresa found the windows entrancing, with their candles and green wreaths. She was a little homeless thing. The last of her family had died in the year when she and her voice went out into the world alone. She had been praised, prophesied about, but not mothered; and a brooding benevolence was what she got from her new companion, who thought himself old enough to be her father. Just then they passed a house where the lights were brilliant and the window thick with bloom. St. John looked up quickly, and turned his head away.

"What is it?" asked the girl. "I thought you laughed."

"No, Child," he said gravely, "I did n't laugh."

But what he had been thinking was this: "Here is my house. Strangers are living in it. If I were young — and my own master — I could turn them out, and ask a girl to marry me. That's where we would live."

As the advance group dashed out of Leamington Street on the way home, spirits mounted into a delirium of fun. The pennies burned in Willie's hand. His laundress looming in the distance, he snapped his fingers at her, and played with fate. These sober artisans were inebriated by the base metal of change. They met a newsboy, and gave him half. They tossed up for individual possession of the rest, and presently, coming on a slow-pacing gentleman, they surrounded him in a turbulent ring.

"Oh, come, that's too much!" exclaimed St. John, but Teresa saw more keenly.

It was Doctor Milbanke. She quickened her step, the Guardsman followed, and they broke into the circle.

"'Here we go round the barberry bush'!" chanted Teresa.

Following her lead, they danced their captive dizzy, while he, hat in hand, accumulating cold in his reverend head, recognized them one after another, in their whirl.

"O you mad wights! do you know this is holy ground?" inquired the doctor. "Forty centuries of blue-glass windows are looking down on you."

Willie was drunken with delight.

"A minuet!" he implored them hoarsely. "Doctor, you will? We can dance a minuet!"

"No, we can't; we don't know how," said Brandon.

"There, doctor, you are free. Be tranquil. This sort of thing never strikes twice in a place."

"Now, it's my turn," said the doctor. "Come in and have some punch. I'll brew it, and Olivia will be shocked."

But their green bower at Babine was too alluring. Not for this had laurel and holly been brought from the market on weary shoulders. It was Margaret who suggested the compromise. Would Doctor Milbanke come to them? Not now. He must get Miss Olivia and a carriage. So the doctor promised.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTMAS IN BABINE.

As they mused there about the fire, the spirit of the time fell softly on them ; though perhaps they hardly thought of it as Christmas-tide at all. It was only a hushed and beautiful night, with the world expectant. The Milbankes had come, and Margaret sat between her husband and Miss Olivia. She let her soul drift at its own will ; and over and over Brandon looked at her, wondering at his former blindness. He had hardly been able to believe those stories of her grace and fire in her short apprenticeship to the stage ; but now some subtile light illumined her. She was ten years younger, a hundred fairer.

Laura, in a loose dress of blue and gold, leaned against the chimney-piece and gave herself up to that dumb lethargy she loved ; and Llandaff studied her, professionally he thought, and with reference to Olympus. At first they talked little. Buffoonery and cold had brought reaction ; and so they dozed and sipped the doctor's punch. Laura held out her glass, a tall green one Llandaff had unearthed for her ; the sleeve fell away from her beautiful arm and made a picture. Her lids drooped heavily. She seemed a smouldering creature of the genus *felis*.

"Heaven-born, that punch !" she christened it with

her first indifferent taste. "Miss Milbanke, do you abstain?"

"I do not care for it, my dear," answered Miss Olivia gently. "And then my work has given me rather decided views. We never know where it will lead us."

"Olivia's are exactly the proportions for a drunkard's grave," said the doctor. "Don't urge her."

And so gentle was the time that Miss Olivia smiled, and did not chide him.

Teresa moved forward and threw a dried leaf of laurel into the fire. It leaped up crackling, and she exclaimed as if it were an omen.

"Did n't you know that?" asked Brandon. "Oh, yes! that's one of the divinities of laurel. It's a rite. Wait, Miss Hope; there are some dried branches behind the door. You shall have them." He dropped a great armful at her side. "Now," he said gently, "feed the fire."

She broke the twigs reverently, and laid them on the flame. Two of the men watched her and not her pretty service. Brandon sat back a little, his eyes traveling from her face to Margaret's in keen, sad questioning. Teresa, he thought, was almost a stranger still in man-and-woman's world; she had not really lived. Her face told nothing save from its austere purity. She was like a vestal creature in the marketplace. Even her plain black dress, her white collar and cuffs, and the dusky softness of her hair were far removed from woman's coquetry. And Margaret: his heart grew big with pity, seeing in her the signs of warfare, reading the truce offered by a fighting soul and meant for peace. St. John also he interrogated,

and found him off his guard. The grave, still man was looking at Teresa, with the glance of one whose heart caresses what it loves. "O me!" breathed Brandon to himself. He had been filching testimony. He would keep his eyes at home.

Meantime William Deane had been scribbling in a corner. He pocketed the pencil, ran his fingers through his hair, and rose for declamation. Nobody laughed now. The true fire in him flared up like the laurel, and the boy spoke. If you were one of the poor who live outside the arts, you might have jeered at the braggadocio of his action; but if you dwelt within, you could hardly have grudged him his "piece of purple." He began chanting, softly and slowly. Teresa looked at him from moment to moment, as if she felt the gravity of her consonant part, and with tense hand fed the flame.

After that night, nobody could remember the form of his rhapsody; but they did remember what it celebrated: for it was all about laurel and the crowning of poets. So vivid was the moment that the verse seemed very good indeed, so good that it brought the immortal gods into their midst. Each one thought of the delight dearest to him: one of being beloved, another of undying fame, and a third of meeting the dead in some lost heaven. Miss Olivia liked the sound of the measures, and said a little prayer, as ever when she was deeply moved; and Laura wondered whether, if the poem were set down at white heat, the "Telephone" would take it.

Willie's voice trembled, at the close, with poetic intention. That one touch of vanity undid his power. He was again the zany, courting shafts of ridicule.

Another voice, deep-toned but not dramatic, took up the measure. It was Brandon, and Teresa turned, forgetting to tempt the fire. "Your real self also?" said her look. Life was growing vivid to her.

Whether Brandon was moved or not, no one could tell. As he said, his mind was imitative; but his emotions were all his own. So, though he fell into the poet's metre, it was his secret whether he did it with honest feeling underneath. Teresa, at least, had no doubt of it. His was an invocation to beauty and those who create it. He pictured the sacred torch given from one to another, the spent runner yielding it to some more eager hand. And ever he called on Apollo, the deathless, and stopped at last, upon that name. Then he took off his spectacles, and looked about him belligerently.

"Let us talk," said Deane, with gravity, "of love and death."

"Let us talk," Brandon echoed, "of soap and candles." He had a savage desire to retrieve that moment's sentiment. He had gone into his house again, and locked his door.

"Everybody has latitude to be a fool to-night," said Laura drowsily. "This is the Republic."

"Yes," said Margaret with an entreating look at Brandon. "Let's not chivvy, to-night."

He smiled back at her and put another twig of laurel in Teresa's idle hand.

"Remember the fire, Child," he said softly.

"It is a good night to talk of Him who loved the world," began Miss Olivia, with a little timidity, but the doctor laid his hand on hers.

"No, dear old lady," he said, "you could, but we

won't try. It would embarrass us. Maybe some of us have our conception of the drama, but we'd best say nothing about it. I'd rather hear what this poet says about love. Define it, Laureled Head."

"Eternal passion," answered Willie readily, in italics. "Eternal pain."

"Cribbed: see Matthew Arnold," remarked Brandon. "There, Mrs. Warrener, I couldn't help it. We can't have willful thieving."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Laura. "It's a fever of the blood. It's a child's cry — till he gets it. It's an enormous irony, the great joke of the powers that make, to keep us prisoner. They tickle us with transitory promises, or we should be too much for them."

"No!" cried Llandaff so strenuously that Margaret started with anticipation. In the fire-shine he looked transfigured, an ardent youth. He spoke with eagerness, almost beseechingly, and always to Laura, as if he begged her to believe him.

"It is made by likeness and unlikeness together. It goes back of reason, it goes back of birth" —

He stopped as if the words choked him, or he had fallen under the spell of thoughts too great for his tongue. Margaret's face flamed all over in a beautiful color. She felt, for the moment, as if she were standing again under her marriage veil. This was magnificent amends to make her for a coldness she dared not yet define. She was his wife. Their bond was reconstructed. The gulf that only yesterday lay before her feet was bridged. She was unspeakably happy. Brandon watched her; the coming drama of her life unrolled before him, and he winced with sad forecasting of its pain.

"You might tell us what love is," said Miss Olivia to her sweetly. "You are the only wife."

"It is the great reality," said Margaret, laboring at her words. "I always think of it with death."

"You!" said Laura to the doctor.

"I don't know; any more than I know what death is, or birth, or any of the mysteries."

Teresa had been looking from one to another with her clear, straight glance. When she came to Brandon, he smiled at her and his eyes wrinkled up in a way they had.

"No, Child," he said to her, "I sha'n't tell. Nor he won't either," he added inwardly as her eyes interrogated St. John. "That is, not yet," he concluded, with a pang of fear. For St. John was looking at the Child, and still as if he loved her. To-night all the masks were off the faces. It seemed possible to let the soul walk forth unguarded, to speak the truth and fear no evil.

"O dear little child!" said the man's eyes. "Good little child! How lovely you are, how sweet, how loving! Good, good little child!"

And Teresa was glad. She felt as if she saw sunshine and smelled flowers. It had done her no harm as yet to be loved.

So on one happy night it seemed to them in Babine as if the world were young; because they tasted the presence of airy spirits that come and go, ministering to the world's pleasure: spirits that are of the earth and yet not dull nor gross — good comradeship and simple joy and the knowledge of the beauty man has made. And if outside that circle lies the zone of passion and human pain, still is it pleasant to dwell

for a moment in a green valley by a moving stream. To-morrow the tents will be struck, the stream has been muddied at the source, the singing bird flies away to the south; but time and memory are for once in league, and the moment lives.

When Miss Olivia and the doctor got home, in the dark morning hours, they sat down by their own library fire, to talk it over. Miss Olivia toasted her feet, with ankles luxuriously displayed, and the doctor stared at the fire. She was a woman discreet with her tongue, but something in the hour had loosened it.

"James," she said, "I don't believe I like Llandaff as well as I used to."

"When, for instance?"

"Well, in Paris, that first time, when he and Margaret were so happy together."

"Old lady, do you remember Llandaff's occupation at that time?"

"Why, he did n't seem to be doing very much of anything besides waiting on Margaret."

"Exactly. He was playing the lover. It was early spring with him. His feathers were bright and shiny. And now he's moulted that particular crop."

"James, you don't mean to tell me he is indifferent to his wife?"

"No. I only mean he never sowed his wild oats. He's sowing them now."

"James!"

"Oh, I don't mean anything crude, Livvy! I only mean the necessary mistakes we make before we understand the rules of the game. When it comes to life, Llandaff's an unlicked cub. He had an igno-

rant sort of boyhood, and never found out that fire burns."

Miss Olivia was manifestly troubled.

"Do you know," said the doctor, "that what you call sins are really" —

"What, dear?"

"Be hanged if I know! experiments, perhaps."

"But, James, I don't like to have you speak as if Llandaff would be better if he knew more about wickedness."

"If he's got to live in the world, he can't ignore the great rude facts of it. Heavens, Livvy! if you'd been watching the lad as I have lately, you'd hear his senses whispering to him, 'Cut loose. Break away. Get back to savagery.'"

"Can't you speak to him?"

"No. He's got to slough it off in his own fashion, and then wash himself more or less clean. He's got to learn that if his own little habit of life fails to fit the general standard, there'll be fireworks."

"What does not benefit the hive is of no advantage to the bee," purred the old lady, from her commonplace book. "But, James, don't you give him up!"

"Goodness, no! What am I that I should give anybody up? Besides I inherited Llandaff from his father. You saw Warrener, once or twice. He was more headlong than the boy. You know how he moved heaven and earth to marry that consumptive girl, and could n't manage to outlive her. Then Llandaff was brought up in the house, among old maid aunts, and turned out, with a touch-and-go temperament, into a world he knew nothing about.

Dear me! dear me! I wish we did n't have to sin so much to learn so little."

Miss Olivia said nothing, and the doctor, seeing he had made her sad, put out his hand and touched her. He could not have her Christmas spoiled.

"Do you know, Livvy," said he remorsefully, "my besetting sin?"

"Speaking lightly, dear."

"No. Moralizing. It's worse than metaphysics. I get started round and round, like a dog chasing his tail. It does n't mean anything, dear: only rotary motion."

Miss Olivia got up and went to the window, where she stood looking at the sky. The doctor covered up the fire according to custom, because he liked to do it, and then joined her there.

"But, James," she said irrelevantly, "you do believe in immortality?"

He followed her gaze into the night.

"I rather think I do," he said tenderly, "if it's any comfort to you. I can't help it, when I look at the starry heavens. There's so much of them! too much to waste."

CHAPTER X

BRANDON'S PLAY

THE memory of that night stayed long with Brandon, and he felt the abashing shame of one who has surprised a soul. This was a too real drama going on beneath his roof; it stirred within him the creative instinct, and made it cry for action. He was used to that petitioning, and, unless it grew too loud, sat dumbly by and let it go unanswered. For, as he believed, his call to work was only from inferior deities, the rousing of an imitative power of more or less robustness. When life came knocking at the door of fancy, he could not put his hand into the great reservoir of being and draw forth something new. He could only copy what he saw, and nine times out of ten he had the manhood to resist. He refused to let facility mask herself as imagination, and devoted himself to journalism, with a scornful zeal, leaving untouched the delicate tools of a more beguiling task. For, little as he would have owned it, life, and life alone, was his true mistress. Pain was his tyrant. He had escaped it himself, in these later years, by careful husbandry, but still it beset him through the general lot. He went silently on his way, doing no quixotic action, and yet his heart cried out "brother!" to the man who jostled him, and he shrank from the

woe of squalid children. To depict what touched him deepest seemed to him betrayal. "Pass on, brother," he would have said with that spiritual courtesy which recognizes no degree. "Who am I to tell the world what we both know?"

Yet, even in his own heart, he would not have sought in that morbid humanity an excuse for work undone. He would have said that his views of relative values were unfortunately just; they prevented him from straining at what might prove very good imitation and very base art. For he did know what things are excellent. He had learned that you can no more thrust spurious work into being and expect it to live than you can turn the course of moving nature. But sometimes even now an outer beauty so beguiled him that he had to yield, and bid it enter for some brief sovereignty. Then he set his house in order and entertained his guest: not the true Muse, though fashioned so like her that the masquerading gave him bitter joy. When she had gone, he swept the room again and burned the words she left behind her.

Now, constrained by pity of an unloved wife, he withdrew into his own mood and his own room. He wrote furiously, forgetting that proven self-distrust as we forget an ancient enemy who will surely come again. He had a brief season of happiness, and came out of it with haggard looks. And this time he was so penetrated with the sincerity of what he had tried to do that he could not at once destroy his work.

"There!" he said hastily, entering Laura's room at twilight, and thrusting upon her a pile of manuscript. "Read that, and tell me how much of an ass I am."

"Story?" She sat at the table, with sleeves pushed up, a batch of proofs before her.

"No: play."

"Ah, good boy! Trying it on the dog? Yes, I'll read it."

"Give me that — two galleys? — and read it now."

She pushed them over to him without a word, and they fell to work.

Brandon had a trained concentration; he did not look up until the proofs were finished. Then he leaned back in his chair, watching her, and smiled satirically. He wondered how the motive would touch her, whether it would touch her at all. Passion for passion, he had put down the drama she herself had set in motion, as he saw it growing and as he judged the end to be. To a mind of another complexion, one used to brooding on the subtle issues of life, he could not have submitted it. Such a mind would have cried out upon the dishonor of impaling human hearts. But it gave him a small satisfaction in his own judgment to find that Laura caught as little of the significance of the thing as he had expected. She saw its outward flourishes, the growth and conflict; she smiled and frowned. On the whole, he judged, she thought well of it. Presently she dropped the last sheet on the pile.

"Clever!" she said, "more than clever! Sometimes you do get there with both feet."

Brandon sank a little further into his chair and smoked lazily. His face took on the veil of reticence. He seemed indifferent to her verdict, and yet he listened for it with an eagerness he scorned.

"I don't quite see what you can do with it," she went on, frowning. "It's pretty short. Have you timed it?"

"No."

"Short for a play and yet not short enough for a curtain-raiser. Whom are you going to show it to?"

"Nobody." He rose and gathered up the sheets. "I've shown it to you."

"Oh, come now, that's all very well! but you need n't tell me you don't want to see it played."

"I am not in the least certain I want to see it played. I wrote it, that's all. I've shown it to you, and now I'll chuck it into a drawer. The thing is off my mind."

"Why not try it on the Minervas?"

"Oh, pshaw! what's Hecuba to me?"

"You could work them for a hundred or two. They're absolutely hysterical over the hitch in 'Antigone.' Mrs. Gilroy would shoulder the whole thing herself before she'd let it fall through, and she" —

"She, you would conclude, is my own cousin, and could pull the wires. No, I thank you. If I'm not up to the legitimate — and I'm not — I don't want any of your precious dramatic clubs. Glad you approve of it, though — semi-approve."

In the hall he ran upon Teresa and St. John, coming in together. St. John looked very much awake, but Teresa was radiant. A delicate flush had risen in her cheek; her eyes were wide and the iris tender. Brandon had an unreasoning conviction that she had no business to look so happy, and that St. John ought not to allow it. He bowed without speaking, and Teresa made a little curtsey to his back.

"Cross!" She formed the word noiselessly with her lips, and St. John smiled upon her.

A moment later, when the Guardsman was throwing off his coat, in his own room, Brandon came knocking at the door. He was a stranger there, and St. John showed it in his surprised "Hullo! That you? Come in."

"No, I won't sit down. I have a message for you. Had it last night, but somehow I neglected hunting you up."

St. John stood looking down at him. Brandon, who had a secret quarrel with his own height, did not cherish him the more for those superior inches.

"I was at Mrs. Gilroy's last night," he went on.

"Yes, ah yes! Mrs. Benjamin?"

"My cousin. Her mother and the other cousin have just come home by the Cynthia."

While he paused, cursing himself inwardly for mawkish sensitiveness to a situation which was none of his, St. John said civilly again, —

"Yes, yes, of course! Sit down and have a pipe. New mixture!"

"No, thanks!" Then brusquely, "Miss Olga Andersen is there." He felt St. John wince, and felt, too, in the sudden tension of his attitude, that he had straightened himself for another blow. Brandon had disliked his mission at the start; now he hated it. "Miss Andersen knew we were in the same house," he said, turning about. "She wanted me to say that she had come." He was at the door, wondering distastefully why the woman could not have written, or why he need have been her mouthpiece.

"Yes, I see," said St. John blankly. "Much obliged."

Brandon knew he wanted to ask questions and saw no way ; so with a curt "Not at all!" he was out of the room, and striding on upstairs.

Teresa's door was open. She sat by the window, her hands fallen in her lap, her chin set forward in a pretty attitude of reflection. Her eye unseeingly followed the dancing water at the foot of the hill, and a musing smile touched the corners of her mouth. She seemed so young, so undefended ; and Brandon, with an unrecognized impulse, tapped on the casing and waited. She came back to the world again with a start.

"Oh!" she said, rising hastily, "I did n't see you."

"No, you were dreaming. I don't know why I knocked, save that every dream has something sent to break it. You looked like Marguerite."

"There was a King in Thule'!" she sang, with a forlorn sweetness piercing the Italian syllables. Then the light died out of her face, but not really to sadden it. She was growing bonnier every day. Her feet were on the earth.

"May I come in and look at your sunset?"

She made way courteously, and then pulled her armchair nearer the window.

"Yes, please. Sit here. Now you can see the waves."

She took a little sewing-chair at his elbow, and Brandon, turning to look at her, noted the exquisite keeping of the room, and found it the sweeter for its poverty. A whiff of smoke came through the floor, and he smiled rather grimly, guessing how St. John was brooding over a complication. The scent moved Teresa also, and she said impulsively, —

"Don't you like to find people better than you thought?"

"Very much," returned Brandon, not feeling bound to qualify the words by any of his cynical common-places. And as she failed to continue, he added with that willfulness of the mind which leads us to betray the thought we shun, "You get St. John's cigar."

"Yes, I always know when he smokes. I love it." She said it like a confession. Then because Brandon looked kind and words were burning on her tongue, she added shyly, "I heard something about him to-day."

"St. John?"

"Yes, over at Mrs. Phillips'. I was in an alcove making out checks, and she began talking about him to her sister. She called him 'that St. John who cut his own throat, twenty-five years ago.'"

"Ah!" Providence had arrived for her enlightenment.

"They began to recall things. I found out that he hurt his friend, and then devoted his life to him. Was n't it like him? His whole life! But it did n't seem much to them. They sneered. Did you know about it?"

Brandon took off his spectacles, and began rubbing them, his token of embarrassment.

"I believe I heard something or other about it at the time."

"Tell me the story!" She leaned forward, her hands clasped upon her knee. There was no sort of fear in her innocent mind that she could hear anything to St. John's disadvantage. The story must swell his everlasting credit; anybody had a right to probe it.

"Well," said Brandon slowly, "I should say that this is perhaps the newspaper history of it. The St. Johns are well-known people, and the case was a good deal talked about at one time. He was born with silver spoons in his mouth, hall-marked. He grew up, went to college, hit a fellow in a row, and marked him for life."

"The other man was to blame!"

"That I can't say. But it partially separated St. John from his people — mostly dead now. The way he took it, I mean. The other fellow was poor, and he supported him. Went abroad and lived with them. Rather took the burden of the family."

"Splendid!"

Brandon smiled, all to himself. He was giving false testimony, he knew, in withholding, yet he had to withhold.

"Characteristic, certainly," he responded.

But that was enough. Her eyes deepened. She was instinct with pride, and pride in the man from whom he wished to separate her. He had only succeeded in touching up the colors of her hero-worship.

"Well, Miss Hope," he said whimsically, with a meaning she could not guess, "I'll go now. I've seen your river and your sunset, and my warfare is accomplished. Good-by."

He went away convinced that nobody could help her. "Hands off!" said the great wheels and little. "Stand aside! Let us hum and whirr, as it was written for us in the beginning!" So, in a way, he abandoned Teresa to her flowery road and to the guardianship of the immortals who set an oracle in every brake, but so well hidden that the pilgrim goes blindly by.

Back in his own room, he wondered how he had ever thought it possible to open her eyes to the indifferent motives with which a tawdry middle-age belies its youth. His little play had unsettled him, destroyed his sense of values. Human pain was the more piercing because he had put it into blank verse. Moving the puppets on the stage had almost made him feel as if he might stir them in reality. Then he stuffed the play into a drawer, and thought soberly and scornfully of his dinner.

But he had not escaped, for hiding himself behind a bush. The manuscript lay there silently proclaiming itself, as money burns a hole in the pocket. He could no more ignore it than if it had been a baby crying in a wood. He might cover it with leaves, but the piteous mouth would keep on wailing until he answered, and took the creature to his heart. He retired behind a newspaper which ordinarily made him swear, and filled his pipe anew. The world must be looked at through the dull medium of the realism which fights for bread. He threw down his pipe, and tore the paper in halves.

"Damn the thing!" he muttered. "What does it want me to do with it?"

The old fascination was upon him, strong as that which draws the slayer to his victim; for a word created will, like murder, out. A man writes a verse and swears it is for himself alone; yet the thing, clad in some thrilling majesty, raises a regal head and claims its own. This is my world, it says. Let me arise and walk. And even the maker shrinks before its potency, recognizing that he has brought into being something which is, and which must not lie hidden.

Brandon, after half an hour's conflict, got up and took his creature from the drawer. Very slowly and grimly he laid it between pasteboard covers. His mood prompted him to treat it with some revengeful violence; but a rolled or crumpled manuscript was blasphemy against his trade. He put on his coat and gloves, and took his hat with the parcel.

"There!" he said, "Now I hope you've got your way."

That night Mrs. Gilroy found the package in her hall, with a card savagely penciled:—

"If the Minervas want to buy this thing, they can; but they've got to pay for it. Don't use my name."

That mandate was of no avail. Word came with speed that the Minervas had accepted it, and on the same day, the "Telephone" announced its authorship. Brandon knew whom he had to thank for that betrayal; but his resentment was keen enough to keep him silent.

CHAPTER XI

OLGA AND ST. JOHN

THE next morning, when Bebington appeared with St. John's coffee, she brought also, as he expected coldly, a letter. The envelope was heavy and exhaled an odor he knew; he sniffed at it with a certain fastidiousness of revolt. Some fate was always behind the woman who wrote the letter, pushing her into little extravagances of taste long ago abandoned by nicer women, whom he would have liked her to copy. As we seek fractiously for a reason, when we care no longer for something which affronts our memory, in that we once cared passionately, so he was accustomed to think that she might be more to him if she were not this or that, in trifling ways.

He took the letter from the tray, and laid it aside, like one who defers an unwelcome task. But when his breakfast was over, and he had bought an additional respite by reading the morning paper, he picked the letter up again and broke it open. It was very short, and gave him no fuller news than Brandon had brought the night before. Olga Andersen was at Mrs. Gilroy's. Would he call? She was disengaged rather early in the morning. St. John slowly tore the paper to bits, and sat thinking while he matched them again. His brows met darkly, and he floundered

about in a futile speculation. There are crises which admit of no hope ; this was one. Finally, like a man who recognizes only the rational way of life, he stretched himself, took his hat and gloves, and walked up the avenue. His haste accorded with one side of a contradictory nature. When the greater demands of life cried out upon him, he was a sluggard. Events pushed him by the shoulders. But toward trifling issues, he made nervous haste. He was conscious of hating to see Olga, yet of wishing to see her at once and get it over.

It was with an impassive air that he rang the bell, and asked for her. She was at home, she would see him ; and he had waited but an instant when she came down. She put out both hands, and he took them. Olga was nearly as tall as he, so that she looked straight under his brows. Her own eyes were dark, like pools, her skin, even in that clear light, of a most innocent fairness. It would have required little generosity to say that it lacked nothing, losing youth ; but to St. John, who remembered the rose of that cheek when it lay within a more delicate line, the woman had coarsened while she bloomed. He looked with no approval at the thick blonde hair, piled so audaciously. It was Olga's misfortune that nature had painted her with the colors women creep under when they take to rejuvenating artifice ; and he wished, as he had a hundred times, that her beauty, honest as it was, could bear the marks of honesty. It flaunted. It drew the eyes of men. Once he had rejoiced at that. Now he looked on coldly. There is no cruelty like that of an admiration tempered by disdain. He saw in her hideous possibilities, a double chin, a

yellowed throat. The lines of her great shoulders were magnificent, but he found her heavy, or, in icier moments, "stout." Meantime she was looking at him with the undisguised affection with which the ingenuous person regards what he is pleased to call his own.

"Well, Tom!" she said. Then she bent a little, a movement very pretty in so large a woman, and he might have touched her lips. Instead, he kissed her lightly on the cheek, and dropped her hands.

"Sit down," he said lamely. "Somebody will be in."

Olga raised her fine black brows; but she turned away and made herself very imposing on a sofa, while St. John took a chair.

"This is unexpected, you know," he said, "finding you here."

He spoke with the air of beginning a commonplace talk. Olga laughed. When she did that, she showed small, even teeth, the mouth of a child. They lightened the consistent heaviness of her face. If her beauty failed to fascinate, her laugh supplied the little significant note calculated to draw the eyes again. Her look, her tone, challenged him.

"What's the matter, Tom?" she asked. "Come, what is it?"

St. John moved uneasily in his chair. He felt the masculine protest at being called to account.

"We can't talk here," he said inadequately. "Nothing's the matter: nothing new."

Olga had that unassuming good-nature which is the same in all weathers.

"Very well," said she, "then there's nothing the matter. I have n't seen you for a year, have I? Had a good time, Tom? Been amused?"

Through the last months St. John had felt only a dull good-humor toward her, the acquiescence we accord something which has belonged, for one reason or another, to our lives ; but now the very sweetness of her unconcern was irritating. His mind flashed back over the course of their relation, and it made him breathless.

"Amused?" he repeated. "Good Lord, no! What is there to amuse a man in a world like this?"

Olga sat still and watched him kindly. She was never disturbed enough to fidget. Her nerves were steady, and she had a great idea of æsthetic values. False animation was not for her.

"You are in lodgings?" she asked, still with that tolerant gaze upon him.

"Yes."

"How funny! You've got a house here, too."

"Yes."

"More than one?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you live in them? Truly, Tom, why don't you?"

"I stayed too long abroad. If I started an establishment here, I should have to begin some sort of social relations. I can't be hampered — hunting people up and all that."

"How did you find the place you're in?"

"Heard of it on the steamer."

"Know anybody there? Anybody besides Brandon?"

"Yes."

"Nice people?"

"Well enough."

"Bachelor lodgings?"

"No."

She reflected a moment. "Ah!" she commented, and again St. John was conscious of that unjust irritation.

"Well, Tom," she said at length, rather whimsically, "I'm here. You did n't suggest my coming; so I came. Don't you want to know how it happened?"

"Yes, I do. Brandon only said you were here. I wondered what the connection was. Did n't know you knew the Gilroys." He was more at ease, now that the talk touched her alone. "How was it?"

"They were on the steamer. The old lady, Mrs. Ben's mother, took a fancy to me. She is older and feebler than anything you ever saw. So she liked to have me about her, I'm so well. She says she draws from me!"

Olga made a funny little mouth, and St. John laughed, though it occurred to him that some one in passing might catch the rapid confidence.

"She found out I was adrift; so she asked me to come home with them. The daughter fought it, but it was no good. They don't dare to cross her, really. She's too feeble. Mrs. Gilroy hates me like poison; but here I am."

"Shall you stay?"

He spoke with some eagerness, out of an irrational hope of hearing her say America was not to her liking.

"For a while. Anyway till the old lady's tired of me. I might be married from here."

He felt his face contracting.

"What are you scowling at?" she asked. But find-

ing no answer, he rose, and began putting on his gloves.

Olga got up and stood before him, majestic in her quietude.

"Tom," she said, "don't be cross. What makes you? Because I said that?"

He felt himself relenting. After all there was no more guile in her than a kitten. She simply wanted to do well, and she was frank in saying so.

"I'm not cross," he said kindly, and he took her hand. "Don't think it. You shall be married anywhere you like, poor girl. We'll talk about that."

She blushed a little, with pleasure, not with love, and bent forward to offer him a kiss. St. John gave her hand a tiny squeeze, and tossed it from him. There was no reason why he should not have taken the kiss, save that he so frankly did not want it. At the moment, that seemed reason enough, especially since he was willing to pay for it by calling himself a brute.

"Good-by," he said, with an added cordiality, commensurate with his relief. "I shall hear of you through Brandon. Good-by."

"But you'll come again?"

"Oh yes! I'll come. Let me know if there's anything I can do."

"Why, you can *come!*"

He was going down the steps, and with the sense of escape still upon him he smiled back at her, and replied, with the same kindness, —

"Oh, yes! I'll come."

Instead of turning home again, he went up the avenue into the snowy park. The day was fitfully

bright, and he gained a comforting isolation from the whiteness and the pricking of brown branches above the snow. He walked slowly, and questioned himself. Mental retrospect was not in his line ; he never turned his life this side and that to see if it needed mending. He had from his youth shut one door after another upon the past, without musing very much over what was locked away. But now, for some unformulated reason, he found himself in a state of revolt, and it gave him an agitation akin to joy.

As he walked, he pulled out the crumpled sheets of memory and reviewed them, one by one. There was his first youth, filled with the natural pangs and appetites. Then there came a day when the fabric of things rolled up and blackened like charred paper, because he thought he had killed a man. From that time no one had understood his life, and its poverty under a delusive gilding. Not even to himself had it, of late years, been worth the justifying. From that one day when he struck the man, he had turned into the retrograde path of cowardice, and now he seemed to be acquainted with two distinct personalities, the young St. John and the disgraced one. There had been a great deal of talk, in the beginning, about his remorse for the black deed of his life, and the devotion meant to atone for it. His little Brahmin world delighted to formulate his relation to Jim Andersen as a somewhat hysterical bond, after the pattern of David and Jonathan. He knew that, and knew also that it was not worth while to set the blunder right. He never deceived himself for a moment ; he had lived under the sway of an unscrupulous spirit, had hated it and not escaped. It was a shameful acquiescence. Andersen had bled

him of money, money, and money again, never losing sight of the fact that money cannot atone for squandered prospects. To that St. John doggedly agreed. The invalid chose to go abroad, and not alone. St. John took him. Jim was no angel, though under what is considered the sanctifying influence of physical misery. He gambled; it was his only amusement. He drank; that was his only exhilaration. St. John alternately winked at his vices, with a bitter consciousness that they were substitutes for the legitimate joys of a more robust life, and saved him from their consequences. They fell into a poor dog-trot from one spa to another, and when it seemed as if that hopeless progress might last forever, Andersen's mother died and his sister was left alone. Then Jim cursed aloud and lavishly because he was disabled and could never do anything for the girl. She was musical and ambitious; where could she study? St. John, in a growing scorn of human greediness, told him to send for her and have her educated. He got a slight cynical amusement out of the situation, lacking as he was in humor. Come one, come all, he would have said. If there are impecunious aunts, undeserving cousins or uncles, bring them on. Here is the purse. Dip into it. Be bold. Be free. Regard it as your own, so long as it lasts.

Olga came, making no pother about accepting a stranger's bounty. Instantly she proved her own excuse for coming. Her beauty, her ingenuousness and charm, made their jaded life over into something quite new and on the whole desirable. She liked her piano, she liked Jim, from some sense of the accustomed, and presently she liked St. John, in that pro-

saic way of hers which seemed at first entrancing. It looked like the simplicity of an emotion entirely unspoiled. Jim got used to her. His tyranny was generous enough to include her as well as St. John, and, common sufferers, they made common cause of kindness against him. So they found themselves the more at one. If they had married then ! St. John used to think of it with a quickened heart. Now he only thought of it idly, as an inferior kind of imprisonment for life. Jim had at once resented their bond. The passion of a greedy nature kept him on the watch for what might infringe on the privileges that had become his rights. More than that, a project forever hovered above him of marrying Olga to some man of high degree. St. John and Olga acquiesced, at first with heart-burnings and then as a condition of life, and the poor drama went dulling on to its close. The years betrayed them, as time will when houses are built upon the sand. Olga, with a single-mindedness which at first roused St. John to jealous protest and then removed him from her, cultivated penniless princes and admiring barons, as her brother ordered ; but there was no market for a dowerless American. She went on with her music, to find that she was only a machine-made player, after all. She had no genius ; her technique was the product of industry and in no way rare enough to dazzle.

After this sort of routine had gone on for so many years that it seemed as if life were made that way, St. John gave himself a little latitude ; there were short absences, then longer ones, while he left them to themselves and took up residence in France or England. But he always drifted back to them. He was

used to what they gave and what they demanded. He had, at last, no fondness for either the man or woman, only a dull compassion ; but he had no other ties. His father had died long before that early tragedy, and his mother went soon after, bewildered by it. His friends had, in the manner of the world, accepted his own view of his life. He had behaved as if that one deed were irreparable. He had considered himself a marked man, and worn the mark outside. They spoke of him, even in his youth, as one who was ; and by and by he was never remembered, save in connection with "that woman" who had not even the good taste to keep in the background. They might have forgiven him the woman, but not the audacity of acknowledging her. And so, since nobody had kept the right to criticise him to his face, St. John lived in his glass house, and never imagined that Olga was the target of peering eyes. As absence had broken his connection with America, so his persistent coldness did the rest. There must be an occasional cock to Æsculapius. We may not prize the world's opinion, but if it is to be even partly just, we must not quite ignore it.

As the years went on, it was not Olga who refused marriage: St. John urged it no more. But the tie between them existed, and so, when Andersen died and St. John broke away to America, it was, as he honestly believed, to settle certain business claims before he bound himself forever. Olga agreed to his going. She liked her placid Continental life. St. John was "own folks." She had no disturbing doubt that he belonged to Jim and her, and always, however far he fled, he would reappear. The months went by. He

wrote dutifully — he was ever a dull penman — but he did not come. So, out of her practical foresight she decided to follow, and look into things with her own eyes. She was using the money St. John continued to place to her credit, and she made no question of that. But she was getting on, though no one would suspect it ; and if ever she was to be married, it might as well be now.

St. John walked the park this day in a revolt so new that even his own thoughts seemed foreign to him. A retrospective look had made him hate his past. As he saw it now, it was one universal blot and smear. He had not been worse than other men, said memory, in the things for which men are judged ; but he had been a coward. There was the rub. This was not the remorse attendant on the ending of great sins, though even he had learned that what we call great sins die tawdrily. Red convulsions are for the mimic stage ; in life, deeds beat sluggishly on to their lagging close. “Is this dull moment the palm for which I wrought?” cries the soul in self-abasement. “This? ‘Naught’s had, all’s spent.’” There is no untarnished bit of purple left for wrapping its poor pride. St. John had traveled an easy road. He had ignored the duties of citizenship, he had taken pleasure in the fruit, forbidden or not, which grew low enough to gather. He had wrought, — but what? Now he was caught in a web of his own weaving, and he realized that, struggle as he might, the web would hold. Of one thing there was no doubt : his love for Olga, or what passed for love, was dead. He had reached the point where a man looks his passion in the face, and swears, “I never knew you.” There was no tragedy about it.

She was not even a bad dream : only a relic left from a repudiated past, and her he could not repudiate.

The day darkened under a leaden sky, with a premonition of rain. Spring masqueraded unhealthily in the air. It seemed as if the snow might be already melting under sodden surfaces. He turned homeward, his mood more cheerless than the day itself. As he walked, the picture of his shabby apartment rose up before him, and with it a young face. His blood quickened. He tossed aside his memories to make room for something near and sweet, and it renewed him. Yet he was not dreaming of Teresa like a man in love. He only thought how young she was, not only in years but with the purity of an untouched spirit. Circumstance, too, he fancied, beguiled him into thinking of her. Her maimed voice and her poverty together made an irresistible appeal. He wondered, with a sudden practical impulse, whether it might be possible to make her independent, free to coax her voice and foster it. He had no subtlety of humor. No absurd duality suggested itself. He did not even remember that history was satirically repeating itself, and that, having trained one woman for music, he was proposing, twenty years after, to train another.

CHAPTER XII

THE FALLEN SWORD

SOMETIMES Laura came home early enough to give Llandaff an hour's sketching before dark. It was his cue to listen for her step, and then hurry on upstairs. This afternoon, as he passed the door where she was dressing, he summoned her.

"Ready? the light is none too good."

She made some assent, but at that moment he heard Margaret below, calling his name. He leaned over the balusters.

"Well?" he answered. "What is it?"

Again she called him, in a smothered fashion.

"Llandaff!"

He ran down to their door. She stood beside it, swaying against the casing, and very pale. He put his arm about her, and she leaned upon him, breathing fast.

"What is it, Margaret?"

His nearness emboldened her, but at the same time smote her with the contrast between his old self and this. Even the passion of his sympathy was gone. Kindliness was left, solicitude, but not what she called love.

"Llandaff!" she said again, and leaned her head against him. She was in that last despair, too dull

to find expression. This was the lassitude of suffering prolonged beyond all hope.

"Headache?" he asked. He heard Laura stirring above, and daylight was fast going. "Run back and lie down. No? Don't you want to come upstairs while I work? She'll give you the couch."

"Yes, I should like that," she answered weakly, and turned with him.

It was something to have him near: a tantalizing pleasure. She had not yet conquered the old belief that there was some virtue in his presence. If his bodily self stayed by, the errant spirit might return.

Laura had settled herself in the great chair.

"Come, woo me! woo me!" she exclaimed, and Margaret winced. She was in no mood for irrelevant quotations. Llandaff forgot her instantly, her and her headache. His eyes lighted. His heart expanded warmly at sight of Laura. She meant to him not only a woman but the world itself. He wanted life, and life seemed always to be flooding in through her.

"Stupid old girl!" he said, scolding and fond. "You're all thumbs to-day. Your drapery's a mop. Put that foot there — so. I can't waste my time on a wooden doll."

They laughed, and Margaret, rather chilled in her sense of aloofness, went round to the window and curled up there, on the divan.

"More pillows?" called Laura. "They've fallen overboard at the end. I can't turn to see if you're comfy. Commercialism forbids."

Llandaff knelt at his model's feet, arranging her drapery, fold on fold.

"How did I get this yesterday?" he frowned.

"It's impossible to repeat. Oh, what's the use anyway? The last two figures weren't worth their salt. This won't be. I don't know how to fix your sheets and pillow-cases. Look at this. O Lord!"

Laura sprang up and freed herself.

"I can tell you what's the matter," she said. "You're tired of recumbencies. You've tried me sitting, lying—why not standing? Give me a pose. What do you want? Liberty? Bring me that sword from the corner. 'Twas me father's! No, it was our great-grandfather's, yours and mine."

He drew it out from a pile made by umbrellas, sticks, and two warming-pans. She took and brandished it. He restrained her, admiringly.

"Look out for the chandelier. Here, give it to me. Raise your arm—so. I'd like to get that muscle. Jove! I never saw such muscle in a woman's arm. See it swelling there!"

He held her arm, his look devouring it. Margaret, watching them with a face frozen into quiet, waited to see it touch his lips. Meantime Laura pursed her mouth like a child who has been praised, opening and shutting her fist with a monstrous affectation of strength.

Between them the sword came to the floor, a boss of the hilt upon her slippered foot. She gave a little cry, bent her knee and held it with both hands, in genuine pain. Llandaff kicked the sword aside with a clang, and clasped his arms about her. Margaret, risen, bending toward them, read, not their attitude but his face. She had seen it so a thousand times, but for her alone. She knew it by heart, the softening of the lines, the hot solicitude. He cried out sharply,

"It was my fault. I did it. Your foot! Dearest!"

Laura laughed a quick, vexed laugh, and flung him off. She hated unproductive sentiment. Quicker than the motion, Margaret was there beside them. She stepped between, a figure of revolt. She was not deceiving herself. Her passion was all rage, and she knew it for that, but the rage seemed holy.

"Stand off!" she cried, in the sharp note of tragedy. "Llandaff, don't touch that woman. Don't touch her!"

Alas! poor jealous heart! Ever "that woman"! The man might sin, but the man she loved even more hotly than before. It was her rival who must pay.

"Margaret," he said roughly, "be careful. You are beside yourself."

He had the wholesome desire of saving them all from a scene. Perhaps at the moment he neither weighed nor remembered what had caused the flurry. Laura was humming a song under her breath, wishing them both back in their fool's paradise, and calling herself a fool for helping them out of it. She looked at Margaret, not unkindly.

"You are tired to death," she said. "I don't wonder. Run for a walk, both of you. We can't work. We're 'not i' the vein.' Besides, he's dislocated my toe."

Margaret stood quite still. Her face had stiffened into the semblance that mocks at life. She knew the hour had struck: the hour to which all these moments had been leading.

"You have taken away my husband," she said. "You are a thief. You killed something in us both. You are a murderer."

Llandaff laid his hand upon her wrist. He spoke sharply, to recall her.

"Stop! You're crazy. Go downstairs."

"No, I am not crazy," said Margaret, this time without passion. "I have been watching you for a long time. I have been wondering how this would happen. I knew I should call her a thief and a murderer. I have done it now. I am glad." She looked at Laura, narrowing her eyes as if in malice over what she had to say. "You are a thief," she repeated. "You are a murderer. You have killed something, and you can't bring it to life."

She sank slowly down, without volition, but because the earth yielded under her. Finding her knees, she knelt there, her head upon the couch. Her brain was floating. She felt the agony of an intense light flooding upon the eyes. Thought itself was quickened until it was all pain. The walls of the room seemed to have receded, and let her into a universe filled with rarefied air. Laura was looking at her still with some kindness and a little contempt. She could not understand such an emotional outlay. It seemed to go beyond the limits of life and death for something not worth life and death at all. Llandaff, in his turn, looked at Laura. He was angry, disturbed, ashamed; but under all was at last a community of understanding with her whose eyes he sought. He had drifted, careless of shore or port. Yet here he was, flung by one resistless breaker upon the land he coveted.

"Go downstairs," said Laura to him. "Take her down. I can't be bothered in this fashion."

Margaret came to her feet. The action was beautiful, the grace of training and the grace of nature both combined. Again she confronted Laura.

"I am going," she said. "But let me tell you this: You are a lying woman. You love yourself. Nothing else, nothing on God's earth. He thinks you could love him. You never loved anything. Never!" She walked to the door, her head turned, her burning eyes still fixed. Laura was indeed a promoter. In that moment she understood why Margaret had held the stage. She admired her. She hated to see material lost, and honestly wished her back there where emotion bears a market value. Llandaff was hesitating, and raising her brows, she gave him a little gesture of dismissal. She had had enough of both. He frowned and went, but at the door he looked back at her where she was pushing the portière aside, to enter the next room. Her arm was outlined against the velvet, and the senses ached at it. He strode back into the room, and there seized her hand and kissed it. She pulled it away.

"Ah! bah!" she cried, but he was gone.

Then she went in to dress, and think about a column for the morning "Telephone."

Llandaff, at his own door, hesitated, tempted to take to the outer world, and conscious, with irritation, that it was impossible to go without hat and coat. He went in, and found Margaret waiting. She stretched out her arms to him, and he approached unwillingly. She had taken a stand, and forced him also into action. He revolted against it, and against her also. She had complained of his aloofness. He was changed, had been the tenor of her cry. Now, as he realized, so was she to him. A current of cool air was blowing between them. She seemed an alien presence. He would have walked away from her, denying her even

a word, save that he feared her so in this new part. She seemed like an irresponsible creature who might bring the house about his ears.

"Well?" he began abruptly. "What is it?"

She was all soft contrition. She bent to him imploringly, yielding in every fibre of her frame. The posture seemed theatrical, and he grew cold. His old jealousy of her profession hardened him. Suspicion reared its head. How could he tell what she felt from what she seemed to feel? These weapons might be subtly chosen to turn him from his way.

"Llandaff," she repeated, and again his name, "Llandaff, love me! Can't you? I have tried not to ask it — all the old life, the old ways — but now my strength is gone. I have kept still so long. You have been going away from me; and if you don't come back, — Llandaff, I shall die."

A sob came eloquently and choked her. She moved a step nearer. It was like an undesired wooing, and he shrank from her. She smiled a little, a wavering smile, called up by force.

"I mean it," she said gently. "I shall die. I have lived in you too long if I am not to do it always. I shall die."

Her voice was very humble, very patient. The poor harassed male, wooed by a tenderness he had ceased to court, stood before her like an awkward boy. Suddenly a nervous revulsion swept him out of the calm his will enforced. It turned him into the resisting brute. He drew a breath. "Good God!" he muttered, "I can't stand this. Margaret, be reasonable. This isn't the stage. It's life — sane, common life, here in New England, and I'm thirty-five years old

and you're twenty-seven. We're too old for melodrama. Nobody's to blame. You're all nerves. You've gone to pieces. It's this beastly climate."

She straightened herself galvanically.

"No! no!" she cried, with an air of final protest. "It isn't nerves. I am worn out, that is true. I have gone to pieces, but — my life has been destroyed."

He seated himself on the couch. He looked like a man who had sworn patience to all the gods. His words were chosen carefully.

"How long is this going on? If there is anything to be talked out, it must be done now. We can't live in this particular kind of a hell, either of us. What do you want me to do?"

She made a little gesture of appeal. Yet she approached no nearer. Pride had come back.

"Llandaff," she said rapidly, in a moving staccato, "I want you — you — you as I had you once. I want your love as it was years ago. I know! I know! I can't have that. Things are different. But since they've got to be different, let us build up something else. It might be something better."

He moved uneasily and looked away, irritated now by the necessity of answering.

"A thing can't be the same after you have spoiled it," he said at random. "Plainly, Margaret, you are jealous. You ought to be above that."

The whirlwind of her passion was again upon her. She lifted her head magnificently. She seemed to grow and grow until she overtopped him.

"Jealous! What is it to be jealous? I am not afraid of the word. I respect it. Is it to cry out when a thief creeps into your chamber and steals?

Is it to mourn because a mildew falls over your house, your children's faces, the food you eat, and poisons you like the plagues of Egypt? Is it to pray for death because you are cast off? Then I am jealous. But I am not ashamed. Choose some other word."

She was taunting him in excellent English, and he hated her the more. She apparently had on her side the whole vocabulary of attack, while he was conscious only of those dumb forces which beckon toward the universal laws. Her tragic fury raged like a disease. Wishing only to live at peace with himself and his instincts, he protested with an inner savagery.

"Explain yourself," he said sharply. "What have I done?"

"You have done—what have you done? There are more sins than one against marriage. The stolen looks, the sentiment that calls itself friendship—Llandaff, these are sins, sins, and God will judge them." She spoke rapidly, as if she read the lines or called them up from memory. In the face of all the years he had known her clarity of mind, he looked at her now in dark suspicion. He wondered if she could be declaiming from a play.

"How you rant!" he said involuntarily.

Margaret threw her arms above her head in that terrible gesture made to challenge Almighty intention. "Where art Thou?" it seems to say. "Where art Thou Who hast created me?"

"Do you wonder I can speak?" she cried. "Do you wonder at it? Night after night I have gone over what I knew I should say. Oh, how many nights there have been! how many awful nights! Then it would be day, and I would swear to be patient one

day more. I have lied to myself all this time. I said I was exacting, mistaken, wrong. But I lied, and I knew I lied. And now the time has come and I am telling you the truth."

"What do you expect me to do?"

Her voice sank to entreaty. It curled caressingly.

"Llandaff, don't you see how our life has changed? Don't you see it? All those years we were together — I can't talk about them. Then we came to this house, and you did n't see me any more. Ah, but I can't speak of her! It is degrading to us both. She is like a game, an occupation, something that absorbed you. That is the way we must put it. But our life together, Llandaff! Think what it was. And now do you know, do you realize — dearest, you forget me. If I come near you — oh, my dear, you shrink from me. And I'm so lonesome. When you loved me, you made a new world and brought me into it. And now you have gone out and shut the door — and I am alone — and so afraid of the dark."

He believed in her now, since she mixed her similes. He believed, but he had nothing to offer her, save a dull acquiescence in the justice of allowing her to free her mind. He knew how inevitably her speech must separate them. In formulating the situation, she was building a wall which neither of them would thereafter be able to pass. It was a declaration of war. Neither could now retreat. Burdened by his distaste for her, he rose heavily, not looking at her.

"I am sorry," he said. "In plain terms, you are dissatisfied with me. A year ago you and I both knew I was a failure. Then this ass of a millionaire turned up, and my cousin gave me a tip. The time

has passed for a name and all that. It has n't passed for money. And even for a question of money, you ought to be the last person to deny me a friend because she happens to be a woman." This was his first evasion. He knew it, and it irritated him afresh. "It is the letter that kills," he threw in, fractiously. "If you held to the spirit of our old affection, you'd believe in me."

"The letter that kills! What is the letter? It is the look, the word, the tone, that show me and the world how you single me out from the world. It cannot be shared without wrecking my life — yours, too. Llandaff, there are things that cannot be shared. In the early days, yes, two years ago even, it would have driven you mad if I had formed with a man a friendship like yours with this woman."

"Worse and worse! You're not dissatisfied only. You doubt me."

"Llandaff, you are so headlong. You fall in love with things and then fall out. It was so with painting. When you cared about me it seemed different. I did n't think that would pass. But now it makes me cold to feel — oh, I cannot say it."

"So you rave at me like this. By Jove! I wonder how many men would stand it. Don't you see you're 'smashing things? You're ruining the whole business."

"Because I am telling you the truth? No! We two ought to be able to lay our hearts open to each other. We ought to share our bitterest thoughts as we have the sweetest. Then we could work together, to see what could be done. Dear, let's try to understand each other. Let's try together and see if we can't make things right."

His nerves were worn by conflict. If he hated her heroics in the beginning, he hated them doubly now. He answered doggedly, no longer able to select his words. They might hurt, or not. That was a forgotten issue.

"I don't propose embarking on any sort of Pilgrim's Progress. I mean to live, naturally, peaceably, and I won't bear nagging. Your melodrama is different from the ordinary billingsgate, but it is nagging, of a kind. I can't stand it. I won't. All this time we might have been leading a decently comfortable life, and you have sulked in corners because I liked my cousin. She likes me, too, and I am grateful for it."

The pin-prick of deception stirred the larger wound.

"She is not your cousin," said Margaret obstinately.

"Oh, child's play! a quarrel with words!"

"Llandaff, forgive me! How can I hurt you so! And oh, dearest! don't speak as if you — hated me."

"Then don't exasperate me. You drive me beyond endurance."

It was incredible to her that he could speak so. It was incredible to him. Yet now that it had begun, he felt a satisfaction in it.

"How terrible it is!" she whispered.

He walked aimlessly into the hall, hands in his pockets. The sight of his hat and coat acted upon him like a breath of air. He came back resolved.

"Have you done talking?" he asked. "Will you apologize to her?"

Margaret lifted her head again with that serpentine motion he abjured from its extravagance. It was palpably of the stage.

"I? — apologize?" she said superbly. "No!"



"You refuse to smooth this foolish business over? You won't put things on a livable basis?"

"I must refuse. Things have gone too far. I cannot retract."

"Are you driving me to say I shall not alter my relation to her in any particular?"

"Are you driving me to tell you to choose between us?"

Their eyes were level, resting hardly on one another. Swords were drawn. The man was terrified first. He knew better than the woman that a deed once done is done. Even at that instant she could have thrown her arms about him and have been achingly at peace; he knew they stood at the parting of the ways. He hesitated, in a cowardliness not so unworthy after all, in that it sprang from forecast of events. He weighed her grief as justly as his own alienation. Suddenly he turned, and walked out of his house. Margaret heard him pause for a moment in the hall; then came the tramp of his retreating steps.

The outer door below had closed when another step ran down the stairs. It was Laura; and though Margaret knew she had expected to go out, it seemed like guilty intention, and she put her face to the glass to see them walk away together. But the air was full of sleet, and the man lighting the lamp below looked like a formless blot. It had snowed all day, and the world was choked with it. Everything had begun to look strange in Margaret's eyes, the white world strangest of all. She turned away from it, conscious of the trouble at her heart and in her throat, and sat down, her hands folded. She looked

piercingly at the furniture, and the pictures on the wall. They should have been familiar, and yet, at that moment, she felt a curious fear of them. The world, to its least atom, had changed.

CHAPTER XIII

HARSH MEDICINE

MARGARET walked back and forth in the darkening room, urged by a pain that fastened on the body with a desperate grip. The soul had withdrawn, benumbed, leaving its poor workfellow to bear the brunt. The impossible had happened. That which had belonged to her from immemorial founts of being was hers no more. The springs of life were pierced, and what seemed her heart was bleeding, drop by drop. Mechanically she began doing things that kept her attention for a moment, and then repelled her by their futility. At one time she seated herself at her desk, and wrote a page full of disjointed phrases, rounding her letters in a foolish zeal. She read it over with a vacant eye and a foreboding brain. It meant nothing. Yet she was not sure whether it really meant nothing, or whether her poor mind had lost the power of apprehending what it blindly did. Then she laid the paper aside in a drawer, and the inconsequence of the action occupied her for a moment more. It was evident that she must begin her ceaseless walk again up and down the room. It would be impossible to live unless she went on walking. All the familiar things about her were alive and cruelly responsive. The walls felt. They ached with being. Every-

thing tangible throbbed with her, not in sympathy, but with the pulse of universal pain. At last she saw it all. There was nothing but pain, pain, pain. The wind, burdened with sleet, struck upon the window like a veil. She stood looking out, noting how still the world had grown under this drama of the snow. Two or three men struggled along with difficulty, and a sudden fierce desire arose in her to be there also, spending her strength in battle. The house was alien to her ; she was more and more at odds with it. She began putting on her cloak, afraid of something in the room, afraid of herself, when there came a knock at the door, and she stumbled in her eagerness to be there. The nightmare was over. He had returned. She might have known he would not leave her so to certain death.

She opened the door, but it was Doctor Milbanke who took her shaking form and led her back into the room. She clung to him for life and warmth. Her teeth chattered, and she looked up to him in sad appeal.

"For God's sake, Margaret!" he began, leading her to the fire, and chafing her hands in his. "Speak, child! What is it? What has frightened you?"

There was no answer. She could only look at him with those distended eyes. At last she unlocked her lips to the one word that comes unconsciously.

"God!" she whispered. "God!"

The first thought was that Llandaff had come to harm. He looked about him hastily.

"Try to tell me, Margaret," he soothed her. "Where is he? Where is your husband? Tell me."

The mention of him gave her a little comfort, and she answered, —

“He is out — in the storm.”

Doctor Milbanke thought he understood ; so he put her into a chair, folded her cloak about her, and went to a cabinet for wine. While he fed her with it, she looked at him, searching his face like a creature in an uncomprehended world. He smiled reassuringly, though in his heart he knew that here was some strange agony for which the medicine has not been found.

“Silly child, worrying yourself sick !” he said lightly. “Of course he ’s out in the storm. Getting mighty good copy, too, I dare say, and forging ahead of the other fellows.”

But Margaret still looked at him with those too-living eyes.

“Doctor,” she said, “why does love die ?”

Then he knew.

“Sometimes for no reason,” he said, trying to hold her gaze, and drag her back to sanity, “or no reason we are keen enough to see. Sometimes it only seems to die.”

“For no reason,” she repeated, looking past him and speaking from a dream. “To live and grow and then to die — for no reason !”

He took a sudden resolve. For weeks he had been seeing the course of her life go wrong, realizing that sometime he must break the current. To-night he judged she needed the shock he had to give her, as hysteria needs the plunge.

“Margaret,” he said, holding her hands in his, “I have been trying for a long time to talk to you — about your husband.”

She made a little gesture as if to shut him away.

"Do you know Llandaff is very ill?" he persisted.

Her mind reverted to the storm. It was a night for tragedy. She reflected stupidly that he was hurt somehow in the street.

"Do you know," he went on, holding her attention by the force of will, "that he has what he calls a plague-spot here near the collar-bone?"

Her brain began to waken. She sat up a little.

"No!"

"He came to me in France, to ask me what to do for it. I suspected the nature of it then, and I have been watching it."

"But what is it? Why should it come?"

"He had a blow there. He called the growth a swelling, and expected it to disappear."

"But what is it?" she asked sharply.

"I am not sure. I suspect — sarcoma."

She shook her head.

"What is that? Not — cancer?"

"It is malignant."

He was ruthless as his own surgery, with the same beneficent intent. Margaret sat up and threw back her cloak.

"What did you tell him?"

"I urged him to an operation. Rather guardedly then. I've been at him since."

"What does he say?"

"Laughs. He's absorbed in his work. Thinks this will wait."

"But the operation — would it save him?"

"Certainly for a time."

"What do you mean by that? six months, a year, ten years?"

"Margaret, I don't know!"

"But you guess. Tell me what you guess."

"That's not fair to me, dear. It's not at any stage where I could judge. I am telling you all I know — the very worst of it — so that you can control yourself and meet the situation. You and I have got to walk up to this thing and face it. We've got to act for him until he is capable of acting for himself."

"You haven't told him what it is?"

"No."

"You won't tell him!"

"Assuredly not, unless he refuses to do the practical thing."

"Malignant!" She breathed the word to herself in a growing horror. "Malignant! how strange it seems!"

"Don't let it get into your mind," said the doctor quickly. "It's a morbid growth, that's all. Don't let yourself think of it. That's my business. Yours is to provide him with the happiest conditions."

"The happiest conditions!" She looked up at him, and smiled in a sad irony. What would he say if he knew she had destroyed the only conditions which had made even tranquillity possible? She shook her head piteously. Her dry throat would not let her speak.

"You must help me, doctor," she whispered, at length. "He must have some peace before he goes."

"Before he goes!" repeated the doctor, with feigned irritation. "That's right! pack his trunk, hurry him off before the medical profession has had a chance at him. It's amazing to hear the laity when it gets to prophesying."

"But such things kill!"

"Do they, O wise young judge? So does consumption, the country crones will tell you, or some dozens of evils that we've got well in hand. Now, Margaret, don't provoke me to wrath. You just do the good-angel act, and I'll see to details. Can't you trust me to be the best friend I can — to him and you, too?"

"Oh, to me! leave me out. Think of him — what will help him, save him."

"And you're not going to worry?"

"What a question! No, I'm not going to worry. I've got something to do."

"I mean, you're not going to fret, lose sleep, cry by night?"

"Not one of those damaging things. I'll take care of myself."

"Now I'll plough my way home and send Olivia over here to spend the night. I fancy the carriage can get up the hill."

"No, no, doctor! I don't want her."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"Nor me?"

"No, I only want to think it over before he comes home."

"Got any little powders left?"

"Yes."

"Want me to go now?"

"I believe so, doctor!"

He took her hand and looked her in the eyes. She knew what he was thinking, and nodded at him.

"Yes, doctor," she said. "I am in my right mind, such as it is. You can trust me."

So he went away.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UNSEEN COMFORTERS

WHEN Doctor Milbanke had gone down the stairs, Margaret went back into her room, renewed. After weeks of struggling, she felt her first tranquillity. It was eleven now, and the storm still held dominion. A tragic element of silence pervaded it. Traffic had ceased, and a great stillness reigned upon the earth. Margaret sat down, her hands fallen in her lap, and reviewed the moment calmly. For the first time she faced death in its true seeming. The strangeness of it affected her. It was not to be believed. He was going away. Where? No matter where. Only she should never hear his voice in all the world, once he had slipped away from it. There it had been stealing on her all the time, while she thought she suffered the very extremity of pain. Fool! and all because she lost his love. What was that? Is love barter, merchandise for money, exchange of give-and-take? To offer all, demanding nothing, — that must be love: to give and give, and pour it out as sunshine and the rain come down from heaven. Then that other thought, an undercurrent rising to drown out saner feeling, — to lose him from the earth, never to see his eyes, to hear his voice! But new purposes compelled her, and again she looked out into the night. The

snow had changed it. Her own world, too, had been transformed. Outer and inner went together.

She put the room in order, and quickened the dull fire. If he came, at least he should find some semblance of good cheer. The earth should smile upon him while he stayed. She lay down, and with a strange quiescence stared into the darkness, watching the flames as they kept fitful harmony with that unending sweep of snow against the glass. The time wore on, and suddenly something happened. She seemed to go out of her self, to meet eternal issues. There is no better phrase for that inflamed sensitiveness than to say we see, at such times, as if we were out of the body. What it is to be out of the body we do not know; but once or twice in a lifetime we do take a swift journey into illimitable regions. The experience is comparable to none through which the flesh conveys us. We could not breathe such ether every day; but there are days when it is possible.

To Margaret, came a glimpse at the annihilation of self. All the expedients through which the social polity is held together fell in a flash away from her. The instinct of self-preservation bids us fight for life even when we prize it no longer, so that life on the planet may be preserved. A raging egotism pushes us on to hold the soul we love, though it struggle for its freedom. We cage the bird, and kill it "with much cherishing." So are the social laws upheld. But her soul that night made its great leap toward spiritual freedom, and she saw that since her husband shrank from her, it was she who must release him. He could not strive nor cry. He was prisoner to the law. But she, the other party to the contract, could she not free

him who must not free himself? In that instant she learned what love may be, — not the insane fury to have and hold, but perpetual self-effacement. Renunciation entered into her heart, and brought its pain and triumph. She was enriched, set equal with the sons of God in her desire to break the bread of sacrifice and touch its bitter wine. That morning, even, she had been poor because he denied her words, confidence, caresses, the small outward symbols of a sacred bond. Now they seemed as tinsel is to gold. She had taken on herself the greater part of leaving him because he wanted to be free.

The night was appalling in its hush and whiteness. Soft intermittent flashes like heat lightning flushed the snowy air. They thrilled her with premonitory awe. It seemed as if the day born of such a night must be different from other days. Save that her own thoughts ranged themselves more nobly than verse, she might have said : —

“ ‘ Who knows but the world may end to-night ! ’ ”

Yet through this exaltation, at her heart there dwelt the old, keen pain awakened by the touch of grief. As those who have once seen death never can ignore it any more, she knew that the taste of life in her mouth must thenceforth carry an abiding bitterness. She accepted it, the beneficent rue and wormwood measured out for her. She felt capable of an infinite hunger and thirst, — the hunger of unstanchèd desires, the thirst of mortality denied its mortal draught. Would there be consolation? It seemed impossible ; yet, even while she doubted, consolation came. The room seemed suddenly peopled with divine intelligences, merciful as the heart of God.

She smiled with her drawn lips, and, in her ecstasy of quickened life, found herself speaking aloud to them.

"Don't leave me!" she kept murmuring. "Do not leave me or I shall die. Not my body, but my spirit, — that would die."

Again they bent over her — was it they or the accumulated love and pity of the universe? They leaned over her, and bathed her in a roseate cloud.

Presently her strained intelligence relaxed, and she slept a little. Then the morning dawned, white and very silent, because the snow lay too deep to be easily cleared away. Margaret awoke, quickly and with reminiscent pain, to her altered world, and rose with that sense of hastened effort left with us sometimes after a death. The time is short, we feel; now we must live keenly, to make up for those old dullard days. While she was pouring her coffee, a step went by the door, and she hurried out.

"Laura," she called, "could you come in? Give me a minute — please!"

Laura stood on the stairs above, holding her snowy draperies. She had been caught away from home and forced to spend the night at a second-rate hotel, an irregularity she hated. New lines of weariness had aged her face. She looked down now, bored and frowning. Margaret's tone meant more tragedy.

"I'm too snowy," she said. "It's primeval wilderness outside. Don't ask me to talk."

Margaret ran up two or three stairs, not to be overheard.

"You need n't talk," said she. "I only want you to forget what I said yesterday, — to let things be as they were."

Laura answered her glance good-naturedly. She cared more about dry skirts, at that moment, than the subtleties of the moral law.

"Don't mention it," she said. "I don't want a row. If you'll excuse me for saying so, you began it."

To Margaret the interview grew suddenly grotesque in the light of her awful vigil. The incongruities of the things of this world made themselves manifest, and she laughed; but the laugh sounded light-hearted.

"Yes," said she, "it was I. And I'm the one to cry for quarter. Let's have a good time, Laura, all of us together!"

"Yes," agreed Laura, toiling upstairs, "with all my heart. After I get on dry togs!"

As she went, she speculated on the cause that could have altered Margaret from a creature who sulked in corners to brightness of eye and hectic cheek and the facile tongue that begged for pleasure. "That," said she to herself, with a contemptuous smile, "is probably the artistic temperament."

But Margaret, drinking her coffee alone, was again planning for "good times." He should have them, such as his little world could buy, before he should go hence. Events seemed nothing but a moving pageant for him to see, and she it was who had the ordering of it. Suddenly she heard him at the door. A great wave of feeling swept over her, almost overwhelming her desire to be calm. She could have cast herself at his feet, begging him to accept her sacrifice and her denying love. But she kept her place, and called to him:—

"Llandaff! I'm in here. Come to breakfast."

He made no answer. She heard him taking off his great-coat in the hall. Then he went into his own room, and by and by came out, shaven and a little refreshed, though he still looked haggard.

"I've made fresh coffee," said she. "You must be frozen."

He had meant to go directly away again, but moved a little by her tone, he came hesitatingly to the door. She sat there, pouring his coffee, the quiet housewife at her task. Seeing him there on the threshold, doubtful of her and of himself, she looked up with a little laugh.

"Oh, come in, Llandaff! If a man can't come into his own dining-room and drink his own coffee without being nagged — well, it's a pity. I apologize. I'd do it word by word if it weren't so disagreeable. But I'm sorry for yesterday. I was nervous, unstrung. I've told Laura so. She forgives me. Please!"

He was mightily taken aback. He had come home to tragic concessions, and here was the sanity of common life. So he sat down and drank his coffee, silent, not from sulkiness, but the difficulty of changing his point of view.

"It was a great storm, was n't it?" she said.

"Yes. The 'Telephone' gave me a job to meet the Cynthia and describe her as she came in. She was covered with ice. When I got the story done, it was pretty late, and I dozed away in the office till morning."

Margaret folded her napkin.

"Coffee?" she asked, and he passed his cup.

Then she rose and looked about her.

"I'm going to be busy to-day," she said. "It's laziness that's the matter with me. No wonder I

have nightmares and panics. Now I'm going to work."

Llandaff rose also, and stood holding the back of his chair with both hands.

"Do you want me to stay here?" he asked. "Do you want to keep on?"

Nature and all her loving past were pushing her toward him. There was her place, they counseled, clinging to his breast. But she had learned her lesson.

"Please, Llandaff," she said quite simply. "I'll be good."

For the first time in many weeks he was studying her face, amazed at its brightness, the look of the dilated eyes. She might have been a creature fortified by drugs. It shook him into a new kindliness. "What has happened to you?" he asked. "You must have had good news."

She knew the day was saved. If she could impress him so, at such a time, she was prepared for all her masquerading. A sense of dramatic security rose in her.

"The sun is out," she said, pointing to the window. "I did n't like that storm."

As he still gazed at her, resolution wavered and she made her first mistake.

"Llandaff," she cried beseechingly, "will you let things be — as they were?"

The hint of tragedy again repelled him.

"Things must be," he said doggedly, "as they can."

She was alert to this new weather. Her answer followed lightly.

"And they can be very nice! Now I'm going out to let you have a chance to nap. Do lie down."

If you 've written your story and earned your dinner, why, there's all day before you. Laura came home tired to death. I feel like a lily of the field, with all this toiling and spinning going on."

He smiled faintly, and went into the parlor, where she heard him throw himself on the couch. Then she put on her cloak and hat, and slipped out noiselessly. Teresa was just coming down the stairs with her can for milk. Bebington was ready to furnish trays, but Teresa, because she was poor, cooked her own slender meals. Margaret took her hand with an impulsive haste, and Teresa looked at her in wonder. Mrs. Warrener had always seemed to her as lovely as a picture, and as cold. As for Margaret, it was not the girl's hand she touched. It was human kind, and she caught at it in that remorseful eagerness we show when life seems all too short to let us prove our love.

"I've had breakfast," said she. "Let me get your milk."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Warrener! I love the snow."

They went down together, and stood a moment at the door. The street was piled. No horse could climb its length that day. The river lay cold under a colder sky; yet life seemed glowing. Teresa took a little dancing step. Life and youth were lusty in her, and Margaret, whose youth was over, looked at her and smiled. Then they parted, Margaret taking her way through the square into a park where the miracle of day was doing. The snow was very light, and the park was packed with it. The trees were white also, dripping softness at every twig, and veiled on one side of every branch with the same clean drapery.

Little paths had been trodden, and there people were walking, all quite silent, hushed by the miracle. Some of the wider thoroughfares were already cleared, but the work had been done with a certain grandeur. The shovel had cleft straight down through the snow, and cut it, on either side, into noble surfaces. The day was not yet splendid according to its promise. It was veiled all over with gray, and through this the sun shone, not with brightness but the semblance of it, a glamour that continued, for Margaret, the past wonders of the night. She passed dreamily through the silent aisles, and those who met and passed her seemed to go dreamily also. The extraordinary beauty of the day had touched them. Either their faces wore the look of blessedness, or she imagined it.

She went on, not thinking, but pervaded by the miracle of life. So she crossed the park, and then, returning, rang at the Milbankes' door. The doctor and Miss Olivia were in the library, a picture of domestic ease. He was reading the paper, his legs stretched toward the friendly blaze, and Miss Olivia, a basket at her side, darned his stockings in a great pretense of domesticity. But she and the doctor knew all about this little device of hers. He was aware that she only lingered for his leaving to huddle her basket into the cupboard and scurry away to Lazarus, who perpetually awaited her. They rose and welcomed Margaret with a warming heartiness. Miss Milbanke took her cloak, and the doctor drew off her clogged overshoes.

"Now this is something like," said he. "This is what I call beginning the day well. Had your breakfast, child? Livvy, can't you scare us up some coffee?"

"No! no!" said Margaret. "I don't want anything. Yes! I want advice!"

Miss Milbanke began collecting her work, with the darting softness of a little animal beating its retreat. Margaret looked at her in a wordless apology, and the old lady nodded.

"Yes, dear," said she confirmingly, "I have to go. I've an appointment, and really I was sewing too long. It is a real temptation."

"Every morning," said the doctor when she had vanished, "that woman constructs a tableau for my benefit. Sits here and sews, to convince me I've got a home! I suppose no woman ever hated needle and thread more than Livvy does. She regards them as stage properties now, dear old girl! It's mighty sweet, the way you women carry on. Well, Margaret?"

She began at once:—

"Doctor, you and I have got to work together. Make Llandaff do the right thing about—what you told me. Make him. What should he do first?"

"Go to a surgeon. On his advice, to the hospital."

"That's the only way?"

"The only way."

"Persuade him, then, won't you? I can't. He would n't listen."

"I know. In sickness we turn away from our own."

She ignored the truism put in to salve her wounds. Life was such keen business to her now, that she wanted nothing but the truth.

"Above all," she insisted, "don't tell him how serious it is. I know him. He would be shocked, horrified. He must n't have that to bear."

"I sha' n't tell him, Margaret."

"If he really won't take your advice, then — well, there's another way." She had thought of Laura. The other woman could persuade him. She should. Indeed, perhaps it was her right. "There's one thing more," she said. "I must have money."

"There's plenty, Margaret, plenty. You don't want me to die and leave it to cats and dogs?"

"I don't want you to die. No, indeed! But that is n't it. I must earn money. Doctor, I must go back to the stage."

She had been all over that the night before. Her heated brain had not failed to traverse all the possible lines of life before her. The doctor was looking at her gravely, and she read his thought.

"Llandaff would be willing," she said quite simply. "But we need n't discuss that. The trouble is, I've been out of it too long, and I am not very sure of myself. What shall I do? Besiege a manager? I'm puzzled there."

"I could pave the way with Greenfield. But, bless me, Margaret! here's a plum falling into your lap. The Minervas want somebody for the leading part in their new tragedy, — a professional. I was told so yesterday. Could you wait half an hour? Let me go round to Mrs. Gilroy's and tell her I've discovered you. May I? Or stay. I'll telephone."

The way was wonderfully easy. Margaret sat by the fire, her hands in her lap, and the doctor telephoned. Then he came back to her; and meanwhile Mrs. Gilroy telephoned other members of the committee. Before noon the bargain was ratified, the play was in her hands, and the doctor triumphant.

"I've taken all your time," she said contritely, when she left him.

He glowed upon her from the doorway. "I consider this," said he, "one of the well-spent mornings of my life. My chest expands. God bless you!"

When Margaret reached home, she went at once into the little room where Llandaff was turning over his sketches. He was scowling under the irritated consciousness that the work was at its dead point; he needed another lift of inspiration to get beyond it. When she entered, he shuffled the papers together. They breathed of Laura, and in spite of Margaret's disarming coolness of the morning, that threatened more talk. But Margaret was apparently thinking of something else.

"Llandaff," said she, "they want me to play the leading part in Mr. Brandon's 'Banished Queen.' Before the Minervas. Do you mind?"

He looked up gratefully. His tone even was tinged with some relief.

"Mind?" he repeated. "No, of course not. Do it, by all means."

She lingered wistfully, beguiled, in spite of herself, into reminiscent longing.

"But it's the first step, you know," she said, with an attempt at lightness. "The next one is — well, I suppose it's the stage." Her voice broke upon the word. She recalled, with a keen memory pang, those other days when he had caught her to his heart and damned that world of trickery. "I might be getting an engagement next."

"All right. You like it. Go ahead."

Then with woman's fatal madness for the inexpe-

dient, she insisted, conscious, with every word, of her own folly.

"So," she said, "I have your permission at last. You want me to go on the stage?"

He was stung by what she implied, rather than what she said.

"My permission!" he repeated. "Good Lord! yes,—I don't want to hamper you."

Her mistake was bitter in her mouth. She went away and sat down, all discouragement, to read the play; but before it was half finished she heard Brandon's voice in the hall, and ran out to him.

"Look!" she cried, waving the manuscript, "I've got it."

"What, madam? Not *cacoëthes scribendi*?"

"Your play. The Minervas. I'm to be the queen."

Brandon dropped his bag on the stairs, and sat upon it in a dramatic perplexity. He stared at Margaret, eyes fixed and mouth wide open, until she laughed.

"You don't seem pleased!"

"Pleased! Heaven save us!"

"Yes, I'm to play the queen. Listen, my lords and gentlemen." She opened the manuscript at random. "Here! Ah! that lovely line." She began to read, and continued more and more brokenly, moved half by nature, half by art. When she finished, the hot, difficult tears were in Brandon's eyes. He stood before her, moved, abashed. He had interpreted her life as he saw it, and now she, most innocently, was playing the mimic part her own real tragedy would teach her how to play. He felt anew the ignoble aspect of filching life to serve the purposes of art. Had

he a right to peer in upon a soul and tell its secrets for strangers to applaud? It might be necessary, in the great workshop of the world; but he wished he had not done it. Margaret stood looking at him with dilated eyes.

"It is very moving," said she. "It has to be, to carry off all that blank verse. I'm going in to work."

Brandon went up to his room feeling, with that curious sensitiveness of his, that he had set in motion wheels which could not now be stopped, save by some crash more damaging than motion. He thought he had learned his lesson before: not to meddle. Not enough of a man to refrain, nor of artist to draw the just bonds between making and being, yet here he had done it.

Meantime Margaret was running through her part in passionate haste, finding it the old motive of the forsaken wife. But Brandon was wrong in fancying she would balk at it. She was the truer artist, for in her eyes good work justified itself. She could read the lines bravely, not with eyes and brain only, but all her heart and soul. She was glad to pour her own blood into it, and she would have chosen to have the blood hotter, redder, to make the mimicry more real. Suddenly, it seemed to her, she knew the road. Life had, in the space of a night and day, grown into a perpetual giving of testimony: the whole truth, so help me God.

CHAPTER XV

NEW COMBINATIONS

TERESA sat by her window, sewing, and St. John paused at the door. This was a delicate picture he saw often, and liked to see. She was in finely fitting black, with white collar and cuffs. She looked, in that uniform dress, like some French girl of lowered fortunes, and stayed radiantly in the memory beside the other women who wore furbelows. She bent over her work with great intentness, and in the doing showed the fine curves of her neck, fastidious in maiden purity. A little table held her basket and a white vase with a single rose. Her room was never without a flower now. St. John made that his business, though he pruned his own desires in accord with her reluctance to accept. He stood looking at her now in a grave tenderness. Her beauty had that element of familiarity never lacking to us in what we love. This it is that makes the first meeting like reunion.

"I'm too smoky to come in," he said tentatively, tossing his cigar away.

"Oh no, you're not," said Teresa, smiling up at him. "Your cigar was n't, either."

He sat down near the door.

"You're not singing any, these days."

Teresa shook her head.

"I've listened for it."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"Are n't you trying to sing?"

"It's no use, not a bit. I've got some songs to translate, at three dollars apiece. Truly, it's no use."

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"Not since my throat got well."

"Only that quack in the country?"

"That's all. Doctors can't help me. It's gone."

"Ah well," said he, with what seemed to him a tactful subtlety, "I won't bother you."

After a little more talk, he went off to Margaret, whom he found pacing about the room and mumbling.

"No admittance, I see," he called, from the doorway.

She smiled her welcome, and drew forward a chair.

"Rehearsing?"

"After a fashion. Trying to get back a lot of things I've had to forget."

"It's all very well to live with geniuses," said St. John, "but you have to be continually minding your eye. A chap can't turn round in this house without smashing something — plays or pictures."

Margaret swept him a little curtsey, and sat down.

"We're a very remarkable set of people," she said. "I'm glad we're appreciated."

"Mrs. Warrener," said St. John, "you look as if you could keep a secret."

"Oh, yes, we all look so!"

"I want to tell you something."

Margaret turned serious.

"Forgive me," she said. "Yes, of course I'll keep it."

St. John began quite simply.

"The truth is, it worries me to see that girl, up there, living from hand to mouth and fancying she's lost her voice."

"But she *has* lost her voice."

"I don't believe it. She had an illness and never recuperated. She ought to go abroad. She should be under the care of specialists. Then she'll need masters."

Margaret listened seriously, with a quickened look.

"You may be right," she said. "But the child is poor, like the rest of us. I don't see what better she could do than what she is doing. She has thrown off her patrons. You would n't have her try to get them back?"

"Not at all. But she could depend on a person who had more or less money and who would n't appear in the transaction at all. She could let the person arrange her life — temporarily."

Margaret looked grave.

"I don't know," she said. "It would be difficult. I'm afraid she could n't do it."

"Oh, these detestable conventions!" cried St. John warmly. "We never get away from them. I thought here in this house you were superior to them. Now if a person, an unknown person, placed a sum of money in your hands, would n't you take it to that child and help her use it? Would n't you do that?"

Margaret sat considering.

"Mr. St. John," she said suddenly, "forgive me, but — I know the person would not, as you say, tell any one else. Would he tell her — ever?"

"Never, of course! What do you take me for?"

"Even then I think he ought to decide in advance

whether he means to have any future relations with her."

St. John felt his brow growing warm. "The relation of a friend, a friend at a distance, who would, in a way, watch over her through other people! That's simple enough."

Margaret hesitated. Then thinking of the girl upstairs, too guileless to think for herself, she was constrained to further speech.

"You'll really have to forgive me," she said, begging by her tone as much as the words, "but if he is to have no relations with her then, he ought not to build up any now."

He rose hastily, swept by a flood of feeling she could not divine. Her innocent probing had gone deep. He saw his future as it must surely be, and it was hateful to him. All his past had been bound up with another; it seemed a growth, not ripened, but gone to waste. Must he bear the dead burden of it about his neck?

"Will you think it over?" he asked, shaking himself into composure. "Will you think whether you can do it for me?"

Margaret put out her hand.

"Let me mull over it," she said. "You see I am trying to look at it from her point of view. She is a child. We are very old beside her."

"She is a child," he said gravely. "There's no need of your defending her — against me — but I'm glad you want to." He turned about and left her, just as Warrener came in with Laura. Ordinarily he might have run up to Teresa's room for a make-believe errand, or only for a word. He had a neighborly

custom of dropping in. She was always expecting him. He knew that, and usually it acted like a summons ; now he went straight to his own rooms, to smoke furiously and think.

Meantime Laura had gone composedly in with Warrenner. It was consistent with her nature that she should take Margaret's apology at its face value and never go behind it. Margaret had said she was sorry. Hating words, Laura had no desire to ask what underlay the sorrow, or to demand a further retraction. She came and went as usual, treating everybody with a flawless good-nature, and Margaret, despising her for that obtuseness, was grateful to it.

"But I can't pose to-day," Laura was saying at the door. "Cræsus is coming."

"What for?" asked Llandaff sharply.

"What for? To call, to moon, to elocute. To pore over your drawings and say fatuously that they're likenesses, only not like enough."

"He'll say that once too often. I'll wipe out the likeness."

"Wipe out my shawl, my foot, my goloshes if I had them on,—but not the likeness. It's that same likeness we're trading on. Don't be a silly. Hush! I hear him. Come up and play duenna."

Llandaff made no answer. She looked at him in provocative derision. "Why not play duenna?" she repeated gently. "You'd feel safer."

He turned sharply into his own room, and Laura, laughing, met Brownell in the hall, and went on upstairs with him. He was glowing, not only from the puffing ascent from the street, but the consciousness of a deed cleverly ended.

"Well," said he, when they were inside her room, "I've done it."

Laura paused in taking off her cloak, and looked at him piercingly. She was incredulous.

"You've done it?" she repeated.

"What you asked me."

"Not the house!"

Brownell took off his gloves, laid them together and slapped his hands with them triumphantly.

"I've bought the house," he said, with a palpable modesty. "The Matlock house."

Laura seated herself opposite him, and clasped her hands on her knee. She stared at him searchingly, so that it seemed a challenge.

"But why? why?" she cried. "I only asked you to find out about it, whether it was really for sale. If Llandaff ever got any money, I meant him to buy it."

Brownell beamed at her. He was proud of himself. He had bettered his instructions.

"I did make some inquiries," he said. "That was all I set out to do. That very day, I found Randall, of the oil crowd, was out looking at it. When he was a boy, he drove cows in Matlock, and chopped wood. He's a great man now. He wants to go out there, summers, and swell round. The only thing to do was to snap it up under his nose. That's what I done — *did*."

Laura seemed disconcerted, and he smiled benevolently.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," he said. "You were working me for Warrener, and you judge he's no better off than he was before. Bless you! do you suppose I got that place for myself?"

"What do you mean?" she asked with an excitement half real, half considered.

He spoke slowly, enjoying the situation, on which he plumed himself.

"I mean," said he, "I've bought the house, and I'll hold it for you, — for him, that is. I understand it's Warrener you want it for."

Laura put out both hands to him.

"Oh!" she cried, "what a friend you are! What a *man* you are!"

Brownell took her hands lightly, with an enforced control, and looked at her, his eyes suffused. He was conscious now that there was something to be said to her when the time should be ripe, as it was not yet. Indeed, at that moment it almost seemed to him as if he could never say it at all. She looked far too fine, too clever for him. He felt his own roughness, the false gentility of his clothes. Somehow, though he had gone of late to the best tailors and squandered with anxious prodigality, the result was never right, and he knew it.

"You're a good girl," he stammered. "It's no trouble to do things for you."

Laura withdrew her hands, still smiling at him.

"One good turn deserves another," she announced. "You've done the first one. I'm going to ask for the second."

His eyes twinkled. He liked audacity. In her it seemed the keenest wit.

"Go ahead!"

She bent forward, drawing him with her glance.

"You speculate!"

His eyes narrowed a little, and hardened. Their

glance became concentrated, as it happens with certain eyes when sacred business calls.

"How do you know I do?"

"Guessed."

"Well, what then?"

"I've got two thousand dollars. Do something for me."

He drew back in unaffected trouble.

"No! no!" he said. "Keep out of the market. Get a good investment, and put your savings into it. Do you suppose I'd risk your money for you? Not by a long chalk."

Laura sat looking at him very thoughtfully, wondering how he was to be approached.

"Ever do anything in the market yourself?" he asked curtly.

"No." That was not true. Her little money was the fruit of a tiresome profit and loss, of weary lobbying and undaunted will. But she always made a point of calling every man her first adviser. It challenged chivalry.

"You sold 'Hesperides'?" she ventured.

Again he was amazed.

"Yes," he said, watching her.

"A gold mine, was it?"

"Gold and copper."

"You made a mistake when you sold that."

The business look intensified in his face, the hard, alert glance of the Yankee who thinks money. He spoke sharply.

"How do you know about 'Hesperides'?"

That was his tone for challenging another man. She had touched upon the larger interests of life; now

she was something more than lovely woman, or something less.

Laura smiled with all her former sweetness.

"How do I know?" she repeated airily. "You told me."

His eyes questioned her. She did not falter. Under that unmoved gaze his face relaxed. He had been sunning himself in her presence for what seemed a long time; so entire had been his ease there that he could not swear whether he had told her or not. He was like a man who may have talked in his sleep. But Laura had been drawing on what a certain jackal of financial circles had confided to her. This was a man stuck all over with information like a honey-smeared sponge with flies. Still he was of small practical use to her, because he tattled evil and good together.

"You said you sold 'Hesperides' for a song," she ventured further. "What made you?"

He moved uneasily in his chair. She seemed to be requiring of him an acumen he had not. That business had always troubled him a little, especially since the stock climbed to ninety-eight, on future prospects only.

"I did n't know how much it was worth," he said defensively. "Besides, in my hands it was n't worth anything. I can't exploit a scheme like that; I don't know how."

"They fleeced you," said Laura. "They ought to make it up to you."

"Nonsense! a trade's a trade."

"Oh, I don't mean money. Information! tips! They ought to give you tips. In common decency they ought. Make use of them, and — make my fortune."

Brownell sat looking at her, pondering over such facility of guesswork. By and by his face relaxed, and he laughed outright, an amused chuckle.

"You are the beater!" he announced, in language his "folks" had used in the days when he sat with them in the kitchen, his stockinged feet upon the hearth. Laura had startled him. She was a different woman from the ideal his fancy painted. She had come visibly down from her high altitude, but she had gained something in the descent. She belonged now to the tangible world where one made dollars, and he felt at home with her. At that instant, he resolved to possess her, come what would, and for the first time she seemed within his reach. Laura watched him, fitting her mood to his, and smiling as he smiled. She stretched out her hand in what seemed unconsidered impulse, and placed it on his arm.

"Come!" she whispered. "Take my money. Use it for me. Think how poor I am."

Brownell put out one work-moulded hand, to lay it upon hers. In that moment, while her soul was in her eyes, Laura had one unoccupied brain cell with which to reflect that the member was more a paw than a hand. But it did not touch her; he forebore. The woman-feeling came upon him, the sense of awe kept by an unimaginative man who has not ceased to trust shamefaced ideals. In one of those flashes by which the mind travels fast upon a backward track, he saw himself a boy, rough mittens, comforter, dinner-pail and all, going to school, and his mother at the door. Then he was a young man, hot with ambition, and his mother sat by his bedside, the night before he went away from home, saying, "Well, you be a good boy, just as you always have b'en."

Later there was the young wife who had died after two years of homely happiness, and the child who, he thought, would always fill her place. These were the soft, beneficent factors in his life; here was the last. His wife! he said the word again, after years of hunger, and his pulse answered it. But he could not say it aloud, and her hand lay untouched upon his arm, until, being an intelligent hand, it dropped away. He forgot she was asking him for money won by a sordid game. She seemed to be entreating for something good and beautiful because she was good and beautiful herself.

"Well, we 'll see," he said haltingly, hardly knowing what he said.

She sprang up.

"You 'll do it!" she cried, confronting him. "You will. I know you will. I 'll draw the money. When will you take it? To-morrow?"

That sobered him, and, still smiling, he shook his head. He made a feeble stand.

"I won't touch your money. Suppose I 'd take a woman's savings to monkey with?"

She was holding him to the half-decision she had forced him into.

"What will you do for me?" she asked. He smiled back at her. There was a pause, while her will grew regnant.

"I 'll take a little money I 've got in hand," he said haltingly. "We 'll call that yours."

"Oh, but it would n't be mine!" She knew the moral effect of an unworldly conscience.

"We 'll say you 've borrowed it."

"Then I 'll give you my note. How much? Two thousand? May I borrow that?"

He nodded, still helplessly, and she flew to the table and wrote her note with businesslike directness. She waved it triumphantly for the ink to dry, and then gave it to him with the air of a child who has had its way.

"There!" said she. "That's done."

Brownell, with a wry face, took it and put it in his pocketbook. There was a good deal of the innocent about him, a simplicity which made him conciliate his business ideals by some subterfuge which should fit them and yet protect her. This foolish bit of juggling seemed to him necessary also, because nothing less than a tacit business transaction would, he was sure, have satisfied her.

There was an imperative knock at the door.

"My cousin!" said Laura regretfully. "He wants me to pose. I shall have to drive you away. Do you mind?"

"Not so long as he's working for me," said Brownell, smiling his fondness. He paused, his hand on the latch. "Well," said he, "I'll report."

"Yes," she answered, deliciously imperative. "And no losses, remember! Nothing but gains!"

But when Llandaff came in, with a word to Brownell, she was relaxed and yawning.

"I can't pose!" she begged. "Don't ask me. I can't, unless you want Lethe, Oblivion, After Seeing a Bore. Oh, how dull he is! how dull! how dull!"

Llandaff's attitude changed ludicrously, thrown as he was, like a ball, from one mood to another. He had come up in a fractious humor. Now, finding the other man so happily classified, his face fell into magnanimity, his chest inflated.

"Oh, they're all alike," he said, "those money-bags! A monstrous fortune is a dangerous thing. No, you sha'n't pose. But let me stay. Let me talk to you."

"Not now. I'm too deadly dull. Croesus wearies me."

Warrener went regretfully, and after her last word to him the real woman came out and breathed. A hard look dropped over her face like a veil, — the look of calculation. She sat down at her table, and, like a little Napoleon, marked her war-map for an imaginary campaign. Brownell was in touch, or he would be in a few days, with certain crises of the local market. He had sold "Hesperides," and been fleeced in the selling. He owned the "Jason," untried, unproven, a mine on paper, toward which the speculative eye had just been turned. He would be a man of mark until the syndicate had done with him. Until then, plums were waiting to fall into his mouth, to keep him on the spot and in good humor.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BITTER DRAUGHT

LLANDAFF, on his way home, one day, met Doctor Milbanke, and dreading the mention of an over-ridden topic, got his word in first.

"Look here, doctor, if you won't talk about it, I'll go in and see Doctor Marks."

"To-day?"

"Yes, to-day, if you will have it. Where is he?"

"Up here at ninety-seven."

"What are his hours?"

"Now. One to three."

The doctor saw he wanted to take his hemlock alone, and willingly turned away. Warrener went on with a firm step, getting a brief satisfaction out of doing the thing he hated in a manner befitting the part. He had, meantime, an ingenuous surprise over his emotions, because they were so very simple, even childish, rather similar to those of a boy at the dentist's. First, he had an unreasonable hope that the doctor would not be in. Presently he found himself arguing that after all he need not do what the man said; and then, before he had time to be comforted by that, his hemlock was poured, and he was drinking it. But the dose, though black, was not bitter beyond hope. He must, he was told, undergo an operation, the sooner the better. That was imperative. His

behavior was perfect. He showed no sort of curiosity about the outcome of it all, and Doctor Marks, knowing the tragic possibilities, and sick of being hounded into corners over life and death, respected him. Here, he thought, was a man of courage and restraint, who drew the line between what the patient ought and ought not to know. But Warrener alone measured his own inward shrinking. His very soul was in the act of flight. Necessity had him on the hip. So let it be. He must suffer the pangs of the flesh, but he could at least refuse hideous anticipations.

But when he got out of the office, the day had subtly changed. He looked about with eyes almost angry in their bewilderment, upon a world that was no longer all for him. The sun was shining, the day was scarce an hour older, yet a veil had descended between him and the things that are. They were not the same. The cord that bound him to mortality was fraying, thread by thread. At first it thrilled him strangely. He felt wonder, an unreasoning anger that he could not at least have gone on into middle life undisturbed by these unnatural tremors. What had he to do with death? What had anybody to do with it, under fifty? Life owed him something yet. Let it be paid. Then, like rushing atoms hurrying to one point, his emotions combined in the desire to flee and hide. After that the life within him grew tumultuous, and shook him with alternations from fear to anger, ending in a blind conciliation of what held him fast. He was in the first stages of our common revolt against the tyranny of decaying flesh. The acquiescence of the atom abandoning itself to the unknown was not

for him. He was like a blinded swimmer striking out among waves that were sure to overwhelm him.

Margaret was at home, and when she saw him, instantly alive to the trouble of his face. Forgetting her habit of friendly distance, she rose to meet him.

"Llandaff," she said, "what is it?"

He too was trying hard, in these days. He meant to be kind, at least; but now his face contracted.

She drew back. This daily separation, an inch at a time, was hard to bear. A great resolution, made on the mountain top, was not enough to fortify her through all this gray cold weather.

"I've been studying myself blind," she said, catching pathetically at the part she meant to play before him. "There's a big fire in the library. You have it. I'm going to study more."

When she had gone into another room, he sat down, and seemed to warm himself, not only before the fire, but at his relief in being without her. The irritant of seeing her had dissipated his black mood; and it came over him at this moment, with appalling force, that he hated his wife. Hating her, he forgot that he had ever loved her, as, under clouds, we half forget the sun. His present mood seemed to him a strange and awful species of bad weather. Hatred! there was no word for what he felt for her now, save that. To dread the sound of a voice, a presence, to become unreasonably irritated by what others admired, to feel for it an unjust contempt — that must be hate. It was all in the bond, he thought, the bond. If she had no claim on him, no right to drive him into moral fastnesses, he could still recognize her worth, not to be delighted by it again, but to give it proper praise.

Now she was his keeper. Her presence was a reproach to the daily life he craved. Then the idea of Laura walked before him in a gracious cloud. She seemed so natural, so earthy in a happy sense, so truly a part of good, sane living. His being turned passionately toward her, and when a knock came at the door, he knew it was she, and sprang to let her in. He forgot Margaret in the next room. If this was sin, it seemed to him only the course of nature, — the sustaining presence, the strong magnetic influence, life currents running with the sun. He took her by both hands, and drew her in.

“Laura!” he whispered. “Laura!”

She drew back for a second. A change ran over her face like a cloud, but left it placid.

“Drop it, sir!” she said humorously. “There’s a good dog. Drop it!” She drew her hands away, and held one of them up ruefully. “You must n’t do that,” she said, smiling. “That’s what Cræsus did an hour ago.”

“Damn him!” Brute jealousy arose, and shook him. He laid his hand upon her wrist. His voice threatened her. “Will you stop seeing that man? will you?”

“No,” said Laura sweetly; “I will not. Not,” she said, flashing into friendliest warmth, “until we’ve sold our wares, and got his money. There’s Channie. Does Margaret forget we’re invited in here to rehearsal?”

Brandon appeared, and then presently Willie, from above, theatrically sleepy, to remind an admiring world how lately he had risen. Margaret, too, came back from her room, a little paler, and they dropped into their favorite seats:

"Tea is made," she said, bringing the kettle to the table, where cups were ready.

"Let me pour it while you read," said Laura.

Margaret relinquished her place, and took her prompt-book.

"Who 'll give me my cues?"

"Author! author!" called the poet.

"I could n't read the stuff," said Brandon, with false shame. "I really could n't. Here, poet, you!"

Willie accepted the book in frank delight, and the play began. This was Margaret's private experiment, a necessary step on a new road. She had rehearsed laboriously with her amateur associates, and in spite of their conscientious dullness, she knew the thing would go. It creaked in construction, but it had life. It was written, she thought, by one who had either suffered or looked on suffering; and Brandon had done it. She thought of him with wonder, the wonder of one artist over another who can manage a different task. How did he know these things that were wounding her to live? For since she had got inside the skin of the play, it became apparent to her that this was the story of her heart. It seemed to her that Llandaff also must know it and scorn her for portraying it. Therefore he must hear it in advance, and pronounce upon it. He might urge her to be silent before she told the world. Perhaps, too, some lingering hope had prompted her to this poor mimicry. The tenderness of the lines might speak to him; a fictitious woe might show him what her own must be. It never seemed impossible that any instant should bring his true self back.

She sketched the first act rapidly, Brandon sitting

near. He drank great draughts of tea, and looked as if the occasion were commonplace, but he had a bitter sensitiveness over his work. He never forgot how it had been filched.

Then Margaret stood, and gathering herself, began the great third act. She had forgotten everybody but her husband. She was sensitive, with every word, to his attitude and to that alone. He had turned away from her, looking moodily at the fire. But she would waken him. She would call him back.

"This scene," she said, "is in the wood. The queen escapes from her keepers. She wanders out there, and meets the king by chance."

She began that denunciation where reproaches are piled upon the memory of a love quite past. Laura sat calm and critical. Brandon was acutely moved. His mind ran ahead, remembering what was to come, and weighing the scene as it would stand in others' eyes. Warrener only made no anticipating movement. She began, and he awoke. Old nerve cells came to life in him, and brought puzzling reminiscence. This was her stage voice, the voice he had heard in Paris when she used to rehearse her parts, its sweet perfection chiseling out the lines until they beat upon his heart and not his brain. Years ago he had silenced those very tones by his louder call to her, the call of emotion, the cry of sex. Then he had believed that his autocracy would cease only with death; yet he was living, and it had ceased. All this he did not think. He only turned to her, conscious of some vague stirring within his mind. Margaret, noting it, grew warm. The flame mounted to her cheek, her eyes, and she so dignified the poor youth

who read the counter speeches that he caught the infection, and forgot himself. Perhaps Willie was never so near true art as now, when he had ceased to pose. Because she loved him with her mimic passion, he seemed worthy of love.

At one sounding line, Llandaff called, "That's plagiarism!"

"It is n't!" shouted Brandon.

"Yes, it is, — Henry Fourth!"

"Plagiarism!" growled the author. "So is breathing. Somebody did it before you."

"Let's look it up," said Warrener.

"O Llandaff," cried Margaret, recalled from her height, "let me go on."

"Fire away."

But with the breaking of the moment, she had lost him. The nerve cells slept again. Memory had grown cold. Now he was regarding her entirely from the outside, as an indifferent spectator might look upon the stage. Pausing, flushed with victory, she turned to him. His distance struck upon her, and she felt widowed. The revulsion was too much.

"O Llandaff," she cried, unmindful of the others. Then she stopped.

"Look! he has 'tears in's eyes'!" jeered Laura, pointing a satirical finger at Brandon. "Well, he should love his little play! It's good stuff. It has the ring. You, too, Margaret. You're the right stuff."

She nodded at Margaret with the reassuring kindness of a nature made to fit every talent into its niche. Again she was the born promoter. Margaret was tongue-tied. She smiled faintly, and Llandaff, catch-

ing the smile, resented it. For once, he read in it the quivering control of nerves crying to be let loose and wreak their madness on themselves ; it was a willfully mute reproach. For Margaret could not accomplish her renunciation unmoved. To have made it what she wished, there should have been a healthy abandon, smiles and acquiescence, the apple-bloom of life. But crucifixion takes the blood. It brings gray tints into the cheek, and dries the throat. The lips are still, but the whole body makes confession.

And Llandaff was tired of reproach.

"It's powerful," he said to Brandon, "full of power. But," he added stubbornly, "it's ill-balanced, and partisan to the last degree."

"Partisan? what do you mean by that?" Brandon took off his glasses, and wiped them from their dew.

"Just here. Margaret is tearing us all to pieces over the woes of an imaginary queen. What about the imaginary king?"

Laura understood.

"Plays have got to be partisan," she said. "You can't balance culpability there. The gallery won't have any halfway business. We've all got gallery blood in us. We won't any of us have it."

"But you are right, Warrener," said Brandon seriously. "Only you're thinking of life, not stage life. And when it comes to life — good God! — which is the justice, which is the thief?"

"Is n't there any right and wrong?" asked Margaret, as simply as a child.

"There is the expedient and the inexpedient," said Brandon, "the wise and unwise."

"You murder me," said Laura lightly, "and when you're swinging for it, the spectators forget I drove you to it — if not I, some invisible devil beside me."

"It will have to be a very delicate balancing of books up there," said Brandon, "whatever we mean by 'up there.' How curiously vertical we get when we talk about futurity!"

"That's a good idea, though," said Laura. "When we're trying a murderer down here below, they may be trying the murdered man overhead."

"Very likely," avowed Brandon.

"Let's write an essay," cried Willie, "and call it 'The Other Side.' We'll show up all the prigs and tattlers in books, and tell what other folks thought of 'em."

"Precisely," said Brandon. "Jane Eyre, for example. I'd like to hear Blanche Ingram's opinion of her."

"A nasty little creeping thing, snapping up desirable gentlemen by the force of virtue and virginity," said Laura.

"There's really a curious injustice in it," speculated Brandon. "We finish a book in love with a heroine who was in love with herself. She has it all her own way. She tells her own story. Nobody interrupts her. It's a burning shame."

"The Other Side!" insisted Willie.

"But not in a play," said Laura. "That won't do. Bring your Christian tolerance into life, but don't poke it on the stage. Justice there, eye for eye, tooth for tooth."

Margaret followed the talk, looking from one to another in a painstaking interest. She cared very little

about this kind of glancing colloquy. She could interpret life, not arraign and formulate it. An emotional child with a gift lying hidden in her nature, the strings untouched, she always felt inferior to people articulate and clever. But this she did know: her moment was broken, her opportunity lost. She had meant to question her husband through her play, and it had all ended in the smoke of futile talk.

"Well, it's good stuff, the play," concluded Laura, "and, Margaret, you're a great girl. I did n't suspect it of you. If I could rave like that, I'd order some gowns and make the public pay for them."

Margaret stole a look at Warrener. But he had heard the words only because Laura spoke them. His eyes were seeking her now with a brooding fondness, and hot blood rose in Margaret. She felt the suffusion of hatred in a body that had not yet learned obedience to its fighting soul. Laura went on:—

"I've got a proclamation to make to this Republic. His serene Highness, the King of Soap"—

"Brownell?" asked Willie incidentally.

"J. B. Brownell has bought the Matlock house."

"Brownell!" repeated Llandaff incredulously, rising. He looked angry. "Bought my house? What for?"

Brandon glanced at him curiously and then turned away. Margaret rose, and began putting her cups together, while Willie, sleepy from warmth and tea, stretched his legs farther and farther over the couch and thought of hexameters.

"Well," said Laura, allowing herself a note of sarcasm for her own indulgence, but modifying it to a gentle pitch, "it may be your house, but to all intents

and purposes it's his. Anyway, he's bought it as a sort of temporary investment. I don't understand the matter myself, but I believe it's still for sale, and if you want it, you can get it."

"He's holding it for me," sneered Llandaff. "No doubt! That's considerate of him. Does he expect to be paid?"

Margaret went off with her tray, Brandon followed her, and they stayed, she persuading him to cut one soliloquy, and add a line or two.

Laura smiled upon Warrener, her eyes opened wide in a frank remonstrance.

"What a disagreeable person you are!" she said. "What do we care about his motives? It doesn't affect us, you and me." Her voice melted indescribably on the last words, and Llandaff's gaze obeyed their prompting.

"Don't we care?" he asked meaningly.

"We don't," said she, still smiling. "Now here's the conclusion of the whole matter, so far as he's concerned. He means to put the place in order, exactly as it used to be. Then he invites us all down there in the early spring, for a housewarming." She saw denial in his face, and hastened to forestall it. "I care a lot about going," she said carelessly, but with a calculated emotion. "I hope we can go."

His own face softened.

"We will go," he said conclusively. "I'll eat his salt — with you."

She called in the others, and told them. Brandon assented, not very warmly. He was growing old in habit; he liked his accustomed corners.

"I'll take a cartload of books," he said, with the

grudging geniality of the man at everybody's call, "and a pipe. Yes, I suppose I can go, if you'll allow me a few palliatives."

Willie was enchanted. He adored the country, as a matter of consistency, though he had no personal acquaintance with it, and wrote at random of larks and nightingales.

"The early spring!" he murmured. "The liberated streams, the fair, faint blossoms."

"The early bird," echoed Brandon, stretching himself. "The amorous beak, the fat, faint worm!"

"The house," said Laura, "is in charge of Margot Sanders, a giantess, deaf and dumb. Her scones were mixed in heaven. Her mother's the guardian witch of Matlock. I am afraid of her. She sees through me."

"Cræsus goes, too, of course?" asked Llandaff, unable to deny himself a satirical stroke.

"Naturally," said Laura. "It's his party. You'll all be very nice to him. I shall. He's a dear old duffer. He can't help the rest."

That was Llandaff's sop, thrown accurately and well. He smiled at her trustingly.

When Laura went upstairs, she took a roll of papers from her desk, and ran them over. They were accounts of Brownell's ventures for her in the market. He had sent them to her scrupulously, lest she should mistrust him of showering her with fictitious gains. She was making money. Brownell had plunged recklessly for her in cheap coppers and come up gilded. He had begun with the two thousand he had pretended to loan her, and satisfied his business habits by a strict account. He thought she was unaware that

he had taken risks he meant to make up to her if his ventures failed ; but she knew it all, and drew thrifty conclusions as to the length he was prepared to dance. Now she set down figures and knit her brows over them. She made a little fortune on paper, the sum she thought herself able to live on escaped from this routine of work. If she could conjure the house out of Brownell's hand into Llandaff's, so much the better. She could live there, with some tax of cheap sentiment and platonic cozening. It would be easy enough to transfer the rich man's money into Llandaff's pocket, and again to transfer it back again in payment for the house. She did not so much care about the house for herself as to live in it free of charge, a comfortable cat at the fireside Margaret would warm. Pride was as far from her as from a simple and noble nature, or the nature of the cat itself. To-night another thought rose and clung to her. It had come before, but so wearily that she sent it away. She might, said the thought, go further, and make the whole thing her own. She could marry Brownell for a look. No more scheming through Llandaff, no more soothing his dull tempers for a price. She could marry the millionaire and his millions, the marble palace, the Matlock house, the scented carriage, the certainty of ease. She sat there and weighed her chance until her face hardened into something that looked like misery ; but it was only the despair of the weather-beaten soul, chased about by base desires.

CHAPTER XVII

ST. HILDA'S

WARRENER ignored his ill news with a dogged insistence on the commonplace of daily life. Yet there was a difference. He knew it when he closed his eyes at night, and again at his waking. Since that crucial twenty minutes in the doctor's office, he had braced himself with facts from the experience of other men. Almost everybody, at some period, had to lie down inviting the knife. They healed, they went away; life was unchanged. This was his bravado, and while it echoed about his ears, he knew it was a lie. He told himself he did not care. Yet he cared. The finger of fear had touched him. At first, he showed a brute resistance. He was unstrung, and betrayed it by petulance and roughness. A sound made him wince. He was unreasonably angry at little things, and avoided Margaret, with a hot solicitude. Yet this also was fear. It drove him into a sweat of terror to think she might find out his fate and lament over it.

"Have you told Margaret?" the doctor asked him one day.

"No."

"She's got to be told."

"Why has she?" asked Llandaff grimly. "Why can't I slink into St. Hilda's and send her word when it's over?"

"You 'd better not spare yourself every pang," said the doctor dryly. "It's no good to begin that kind of dodging. They only come in battalions. Go along and tell her."

Llandaff held his peace; but Margaret, when the doctor prompted her, took the matter into her own hands. One day she walked into the library, where Llandaff sat looking over his sketches with an introspective gaze.

"Doctor Milbanke has been talking to me," she said, in a colorless voice. "You are going to have it done?"

He looked at her in amazement. Was this the woman who had so shrieked over the emotional crises of life?

"Let's not talk about it," he hesitated.

"No, there's no need of it. Shall you go to St. Hilda's?"

"Yes."

"Good! When the time comes, you can run in and have it over. That's all there is about it." She smiled at him, in a friendly fashion, and went off into the other room to study. He could hear her declaiming, and he drew his first long breath for many days. Her friendliness rested him, released him. He was grateful to her, and grew so gentle that it nearly undid in her the work she had wrought with toil and pains. When he held her aloof, she could play her friendly part; if he wooed her, though by an eyelash, she was ready to capitulate.

Then there came days when her own inner battle raged more hotly still. His need of devotion awoke in her a passionate revolt against the attitude she had

assumed. Not show her love to him for whom she would die? Yet he did not want her love, and death was dogging him, not her. Day after day, she battled with her desires. Night after night, she besought the unknown God to let her save him at a price. But the hours slipped on, the time came, and no voice had spoken.

At eight o'clock one night, Llandaff packed his bag for St. Hilda's. Now he was upheld by a stolid courage, warmed by self-sacrifice. That concerned Laura. He had not told her where he was going, and he felt the strength arising from denial. That he was dear to her, he had no doubt, though he never once defined their relationship; indeed it was a part of his cowardice to refrain from definition. But he was anxious to save her a pang, and so, wrapping his deed in blazonry, it was the more endurable.

His task was done, his copy for the "Householder," his sketches set aside against the wall. Fortunately his work for the paper was of the musty description that can be gathered in advance. Laura was very busy that week, and detected nothing unusual. She was absorbed in the market and Brownell's little slips that came to her daily, all gains and not one warning loss. It was a golden time. She was not at home on this evening, and Llandaff delayed, longing for her step, yet fearing lest, face to face, he might own his childish need of her.

While he was in his room, pretending to look about for some forgotten thing, and really deferring the last moment, Margaret tapped at the door. She spoke with a calmness he could not interpret.

"May I go over and see you settled?"

"No! no!" he said hastily. "I don't want to make — an occasion of it."

She nodded. "No, I should think not," she said. "Womenfolks are in the way."

Later, standing on the sidewalk, the moist February breeze against his face, his heart beat suffocatingly with the hope that Laura yet might come. Margaret had gone down to the door with him, and Doctor Milbanke appeared, apparently by chance. Margaret was shaking all over, and she stood aloof from them, not to betray herself.

"It's a nice night," she said. "See the stars."

"You're getting cold," urged the doctor roughly.

"Yes," added Llandaff, "run in. There's a chill in the air. Good-night, Margaret. Good-night — dear." He laid his hand for an instant on her shoulder, and she steeled the flesh beneath. But he could not kiss her; and though she ached for it, she was glad, because her self-control was going.

"Good-night!" she called after them. Her voice had a new thrill. The doctor, under the lamp, looked quickly round at Llandaff, to see if the note meant anything to him. But Llandaff was absorbed in himself, in the plague-spot he loathed, and in the morrow.

But that night he did think of her, through the pauses of his uneasy slumber, when the antiseptic dressing grew cold about his neck, and he awoke, with a start, to the night lamp on unfamiliar walls, and the sense of the inevitable day. He wondered about her vaguely. He remembered how she had raged, those weeks ago, and then settled into something that looked like sanity. He thought of Laura, too, not saying that he loved her, but with a great longing because

she seemed a part of the earth from which he was to be reft away. He clung to her in thought, as a child clings to its mother, and if she could have come to him at that moment, he would have turned to her with the simplest beseeching, begging her to recognize his need.

He awoke and waited for the hour. Then they gave him his coffee, and told him the doctor would be there at eight. The time that followed was like a dream of life, and not life itself. When his door was left open for a moment, he saw the sisters flitting through the hall, or the white-capped nurses with their trays. Another door faced his own, and on the threshold he saw a beautiful girl, with a strangely piercing look of apprehension on her face. A nurse brought her a great bunch of Roman anemones, and the girl reached out both hands to them, with a cheek suddenly incarnadined and a little cry. A petal fell to the floor, and she stooped and gathered it up, as if jealous over the loss. Then she stood there, talking to the nurse, the pink petal held, like a stain, against her chin. Again it was like a dream when some one said to him, "The doctor is here," and the surgeon, with Doctor Milbanke, was in the room.

Llandaff had never thought himself a coward, more than any other warm-blooded, unimaginative man who has not been in great straits. But now he was faint with mental nausea. His flesh shrank from the place, the smell of the place, and even from himself. He loathed his mortality. But he seemed to the others a quiet, rather stolid fellow, sure to take his ether manfully; and doctors and nurses alike congratulated themselves, as they do when a patient plays his part

with some propriety. Yet when the keen, sweet smell of the ether was cold in his nostrils, he felt an unfamiliar terror, like one disembodied and floating alone amid gray atoms not yet clustered into worlds. Centuries passed, and still he floated. The rushing of his life-currents seemed to him the whirling of all life, and he felt what he had never touched upon with the unliberated mind — the greatness of things, the immutability of law. Then as if it feared to look on Jehovah himself, the soul turned back affrighted, and he cried out "Laura! Laura!"

Margaret heard the cry. She was in the hall, her cheek against the casing. She came in with a noiseless rush, seized the hand of a nurse who stood near him, and laid it in his. It would be warm; her own was cold. His fingers closed about it laxly. The slight hand seemed larger than the universe, and warm as love. He understood the visible symbols of the invisible God, though the hand meant only Laura.

"I knew you would come," he said languidly, and gave himself up anew to that suffocating power. A hand organ was playing outside, and the tune grew slower and slower in his ears, measured by sensations crowding mercilessly, one upon another. The blood in his veins flowed rhythmically, surging in intervals. The intervals lengthened and ceased. Life had withdrawn.

Doctor Milbanke looked at Margaret, and she went noiselessly away. Crossing the threshold, she saw another surgeon at the opposite door. It was opened to him briefly, and the smell of ether came sickeningly out. The girl within was taking her anæsthetic, and the Roman anemones smiled upon the mantel. Mar-

garet walked out into the square, where the sparrows were clacking. They spoke too loudly, the sun was too bright, the air too chill. She shuddered under the roughness of the world, and wandered weakly up and down. There presently Miss Milbanke found her, and gave her homely love.

"Get in here with me, dear," she said, drawing her into the carriage. "It will be a long time before he wakes. James told me so. We won't go far away, — just over to buy me some pins and things. We'll drive back at intervals."

Margaret sank down on the cushions with no pretense at talking. Her eyes were lack-lustre, her throat dry. Yet, like those who watch beside the dying, she knew she could bear everything that should be required of her.

When Llandaff came to himself, and the gray clouds began to dissipate, he could only murmur, over and over, with palsied lips, "Such pain! such pain!" The heat of it smote him. It was swift, like lightning, invincible as God. He had no strength of mind to wonder, but some amazement strove drowsily within him over an enemy that could have lain hidden for so many years. And in the other room a drowsy voice, changed like his own, repeated without cessation, "A flower — with one petal gone! A flower — with one petal gone!"

"Who is it?" he asked, and the nurse, bending above him, answered, —

"A young lady. She's coming out from her ether." And the voice kept on lamenting, "A flower — with one petal gone."

Margaret came, to be told that he was awake,

though he could not see her. The warning was unnecessary. If he could see anybody, she had made up her mind it should be the woman he wanted most.

"Now won't you come home with me?" asked Miss Milbanke, with that simplicity people could somehow accept when they were too sore for tenderness. "Well, dear, you have your luncheon, and I'll send James over to you, the instant he comes home."

"No! no!" said Margaret. "Send him here. Beg him to come here whenever he has a minute. He must watch; he must be sure nothing goes wrong. I don't need anything — now."

Miss Milbanke gave her a little pat on the hand, and drove away. She had learned long ago that the suffering must be left to themselves, unless they cling or cry.

Margaret went home to tell Laura, and by chance met her and Brownell at the door. Brownell went on upstairs.

"Laura," she said, her breath suddenly failing her, "Llandaff is at St. Hilda's. He had a surgical operation this morning. He is doing well."

She uttered the last words in haste to forestall the sickening of the other woman's heart, as her own had sickened. But Laura looked her clearly in the face, with an unchanged color. She was drawing off her glove, and her hand neither halted nor trembled.

"So?" she said. "An accident?"

Margaret told her briefly, and Laura listened with serene attention.

"Dear me!" she said, at the end. "That's hard lines. Give him my love, won't you? Tell him I'm sorry, — awfully sorry!"

"But you'll go to see him? As soon as they're willing you'll go, Laura, won't you?"

"Of course! But don't encourage visitors. Hospital sentiment never does any good. The doctors hate it. Give him lots of sympathy." She hurried up the stairs, and Margaret heard her letting in Brownell with some gay little speech.

Margaret went into her room, and sat down to face the consequence of her own act. She had given her husband up — to what? In the beginning, with her unbridled desire to rid him of herself, it had seemed enough to stand aside and let him batten on the world. She had even at that moment taken shame to herself for her own jealous pangs, crying, in contrition, that if she had left his friendship for Laura untouched, it might have been as pure as heaven. Now it dawned upon her that the relation was not, after all, a mutual thing. He had risked the stability of his life for Laura, and Laura was not in the least likely to risk anything for him. An unloved wife was not the only lion in his way; and pondering over it, she was affrighted to reflect that you may reach the golden orchard, and find its fruit all gathered.

Meanwhile Laura had tossed off her hat and gloves, and sat down confronting Brownell, a merry devil in her eyes. She had learned how to please him. Sympathy, sweetness were not enough. He was beguiled also by a spirit he called "cute."

"Well," said she, "how goes it?"

He answered her look with one of pleased self-confidence.

"Fine! I've struck it rich."

"How! Tell me how?"

Her vivacity beguiled him, and he spoke in spite of his innocent certainty of propounding problems quite too hard for her.

"This is in confidence, between you and I."

"Of course! Always that!"

"I've got in with those fellows down town. They're putting me into a good thing. In confidence, though, — absolutely in confidence!"

"But what are they doing it *for*? That's what I want to know."

He threw her an appreciative glance. At every turn she more than justified his expectations.

"You're right," he nodded. "There must be a reason. They want my money. I'm a new hand at such business, but I know that. They want my money. Well, let 'em have it so long as I can get fifty per cent on it."

The sanguine, fevered look of the stock gambler flickered in his face, the look of the man absorbed by the possibility of getting something for nothing. Laura recognized it with a cool certainty that he had got there, and she had helped him. How often in her own miniature ventures had she seen that mark on the faces of those whom she had used! She could define the different grades of it. There was the brilliant glance of the man who fed on hope, the haggard lines of him who had grown old in failure. There were the grades between.

"But you have n't told me anything," she ventured.

The keen glance of the business man returned to thwart her. He rose and took his hat.

"I'll tell you this much," he said. "To-morrow I'm going to buy you a hundred shares of 'Hesperides.'"

She laid her hands together, with a childish joy.

"Is it safe?" she asked, in a pretty shrinking. She returned, now and then, to her rôle of the purely feminine.

"I've got the inside track. You'll see."

Then he went away, and Laura considered deeply whether her jackal of the market, her gatherer of news, could help her out. What were they really doing, these potentates, with the man who had made his money by luck, by sheer hard work, and then the cleverness of advertising? But her jackal, as it proved, could not help her. He was actually bound, this time, to a greater than she, — a man who made it worth his while to be dumb in private, and speak through his financial column only such words as he was bidden.

In these days, Brownell spent most of his time at his broker's. The fever of acquisition had come upon him. Six months ago, he desired only to fit himself to the part of a man distinguished by wealth. Now he saw no end to the piling up of riches. Money increased before him, and he saw in its train a vague potency of other sorts. He was as guileless a creature as had ever been caught on 'change. The men into whose hands he had fallen impressed him with their decisive ways, their clean, swift action. Moreover, they were sympathetic, sanguine. In spite of his hard-won axiom that something is never to be had for nothing, he was moved by their certainty, as the hardened man of the world, used to the wiles of women, feels his heart warm once more under a sunnier smile. He had never ceased regretting the sale of "Old Hesperides." It had seemed to him only a barren little

mine, but now, when it had come splendidly upon the market, he wished he had brought it there himself. Still he had been given a chance of buying twenty-five thousand shares at a hundred dollars a share. The two men who had thus far exploited it magnificently, on future prospects, were burning to get out of it, so he was ready to believe, and turn their minds to other ventures. It was bound to move. He had sold securities, and paid for his shares in solid money. The stock did move. It jumped to a hundred and ten. Then he sold Laura out, and brought her the proceeds. Her eyes gleamed and ravened, he thought with pure delight.

"Did you get out yourself?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"It's going higher."

"Then why not keep me in?"

"You can't afford it, my girl. I can take chances. I shan't let you."

She acquiesced sweetly, but next morning she cornered her jackal when he was going to his work.

"What are they doing with Brownell?" she asked.

He screwed up his face, and winked.

"Ah, come," she said beguilingly. "Tell an old friend. I'll get your wife a ticket to the Minerva play."

He hesitated. Then he remembered that she had never yet betrayed a secret.

"Buy 'Hesperides,'" he said, with importance. "Buy all you can. Sell out on a six-point rise. I can't tell you another syllable."

And he could not, because this was all he knew. She took his word, and put every cent she had into

the hands of a broker, who bought for her on a reckless margin. Meantime Brownell also bought on a margin, this time to the tune of thirty thousand shares. Again it ran up, now to a hundred and sixteen. Laura sold out at a hundred and fifteen, but he stayed in. Neither told the other, but she saw before her an indolent old age, and he pictured himself a copper king, with her always at his side.

CHAPTER XVIII

OUT OF HOSPITAL

AFTER the first three days at St. Hilda's, Llandaff realized that the atmosphere there enveloped him as completely as if it had been made to fit his pleasure and not his pain. He had expected to acquiesce in an unfamiliar routine, but instead he found himself a part of a system which did not seem in the least foreign to him. All the habits of his former life dropped away, like the life itself. He was a new creature in a new place, somewhat sustained by recognition of himself as a centre of dramatic action. About the case itself and the way it was going, he had slight curiosity. The operation had, from the beginning, represented an ultimate fact. It was over, and he had returned, after that mental detachment, to the earth. Something definite had been accomplished. He found himself languidly interested in Doctor Marks and the young surgeon, in the nuns, and their picturesque flittings about the corridors, and his nurse, who looked something tremendous in size and beneficence. She was a compact little creature, but so magnified by her office that when she went out of the room, he felt at once unprotected and desolate.

Twice a day Margaret came for a little call. That disturbed him invariably. His temperature rose, and

the nurse, generalizing on accepted theories, decided that his wife was bad for him. But Llandaff could not have explained, even to himself, how he shrank from the outdoor air Margaret seemed to bring with her, the atmosphere of a world to which he did not belong. All the complexities of that world had sunk into the past, and he was concerned only with the moment. Doctor Milbanke looked at him in some disquietude because he seemed to have lost ground when there was no reason for it. The wound was healing, and the surgeons dressed it to their professional commonplace of "Beautiful! beautiful!" which opens the patient's eyes to a standard he has not suspected.

Llandaff had given up entirely to rest, without knowing how much he needed it. He was not a fanciful person, but he lay there and let his mind run free. When they told him he might sit up, or even, in a few days, go into the square, he felt a responsive terror lest they should drive him forth. His bed seemed to him a safe little island in the midst of a troubled world; and sometimes, when his wits were not floating, he dwelt lazily on an article he might write about a sick man's thoughts. It could be called *The White Island*. That was his bed. He saw how a clever pen could picture the solitude on that island, the abiding peace. It was not *lotos* land, for there was no rapture: only a sad content. Boats came to the island with supplies and messages, touched, and went away. The doctors were stately galleons, the nurse was a capable tug. Sometimes, with that in his mind, he had to laugh when he saw her coming, and she smiled back at him in a frank good-fellowship.

Yet, through all the hours of all the days, the thought of Laura was an undercurrent in his brain. At first, he felt a boy's triumphant consciousness of having done something rather large in sparing her anxiety. He lay in a placid certainty of her coming, full of solicitude and soft reproach ; but she did not come. He had expected all his planets to revolve about him, and they did : all save the one whence he drew daily being. He was childishly disappointed and then uneasy, and Margaret read his eyes. Upon that, though he asked no questions, she gave him plentiful news of the house, with Laura's name everywhere intermingled. And after Margaret had definitely reminded her a second or third time, Laura came. It was toward twilight, when he was tired of the day, and dumbly longing for some change or comfort, only it must be a change to greater rest. The door opened, and, expectant of the nurse, he saw her, who, in her fullness of life, saturated his longing for the womanly and strong. " Laura ! " he said under his breath, and again when she came and put her large, firm hand on his. Then he lay and looked at her in pure delight, the tears coming slowly into his eyes. He forgot the other moments of his life, and sank back into the certainty that this was the one perfect moment of all. It was entirely free from the gnawing blame that had tainted all their previous intercourse. With the great egotism of the sick, he gave himself up to the joy of seeing her. He could have everything he wanted, said his greedy self, because he was not in the running any more. He was ill : he was an exception.

She was cheerful, though not with that arranged sprightliness so irritating to the recipient ; but it was

easy to see that other thoughts preoccupied her. That brought in the outdoor world, with a rush. He was jealous and he hated it.

"When are you coming out?" she asked him.

"Oh, I don't know! in a week perhaps. Two or three weeks they said, in the beginning." Immediately he felt that he must be at her side, looking at the world as she saw it, in order to keep his grasp on something precious.

"We've got to be up and doing," she said, dominating him by what seemed not only her magnetic hold on him but on life itself. "Cræsus may change his mind. Catch the fleeting millionaire. 'Old Time is still a-flying.'"

Then she hurried away, leaving him happily disquieted and entreating her to come again. But she came only twice in the two weeks, and then still more absorbed in affairs he did not touch, and less responsive to him, save as his mood blended with some practical issue. Again she brightened when their talk lingered about his work, and it was borne in upon him anew how deeply she had taken it to heart. That in itself was a spur. If she did not yearn over him in the ordinary way of women with their best-beloved, she cared at least for what pertained to him, and that, he concluded, proved her a larger type of woman, after all. Realizing how seldom he was to see her, he grew overwhelmingly anxious to be at home again, and the night before his official discharge, he refused to go back to his hospital bed. He was going home, he told the nurse, with such eager speech and look that she only fell to and packed his bag, in as much haste to help him as he was to be gone. The child element

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in him did him good service with women. He was a favorite. She bade him good-by with some intensifying of the ordinary regret over a patient, and he went out into the square, and so up the hill. Once outside, jubilation arose in him. In his thankfulness at leaving the house, he did not even glance back. Life had come upon him again, weak as he was: life and delight in the old, tangible ways. The sick fancies that vivified the moment when he gave up consciousness, the after-certainty that fortune might contain many things of which he never thought in health, — he tossed them all aside as, in the sunlight, we blow away a dream. Life was dear, and he had come back to it.

He let himself in at Babine, and went softly up the stairs. Opening his own door, he stood a moment to listen. Voices were sounding from the library, and his heart choked him, since Laura must be there. In a moment, she might speak. But it was only Deane and Brandon in the half-dusk before the fire. Brandon was baiting the poet.

"What do you mean?" he was asking. "You've had a legacy? Solid money, pieces of eight, rose nobles, and that sort of thing? Not old chairs and tables, or an eight-day clock?"

"I've had three hundred dollars left me," cackled Willie, in happy dissonance. "Go to! I'm made."

"Made, are you? What are you going to do with it?"

"I couldn't tell you. Honest, I couldn't. I thought some of having a rug, or some uncut gems. I could get a ruby, a" —

"Oh, come off with your gems! What are you going to do with the money?"

"Then I thought I might go to Venice." His voice fell into a discordant languor, the index of emotion. "Or I might have a month at the Albemarle, and observe the aristocracy. Brandon, that's a scheme, a good solid business venture. One month among the Philistines, and I could write a society play. And then, by Jove! ten thousand dollars a night."

"Oh, your Albemarles, your Venices!" grumbled Brandon, smashing the fire. "You'd better put a hundred and fifty of it into the bank, take the rest in your pocket, and go to sea."

"I said Venice" —

"I don't care anything about your Venices, gondolas, doges, Adriatics, and rotten civilizations. Why don't you pack yourself off to the South Seas, and whet your beak against something new? Join a tribe of cannibals — I'll bet my bottom dollar cannibals have gone out with postilions and sloping shoulders and harps-that-once-through-Tara's-halls. It's a confounded shame. Mrs. Warrener, are cannibals out of date?"

Margaret had come in from the little den beyond; both men got up, and Brandon found her a chair. She sat down by the fire, and dropped her hands in her lap. She was in a state of expectation. Something atmospheric warned her of Llandaff, though the warning was not yet translated.

"I don't seem to care much about cannibals," she said absently. "Don't revive them in my day. I shall be afraid."

"Yes, it can't be denied you're edible," said Brandon, and Willie, always a little late in responding to the goad, came up with his dilatory resentment: —

"Come now, Brandon, why don't you go to the South Seas yourself?"

"I?" snorted Brandon. "Because I'm spoiled, man, undone for this world and entirely unsuited to any other. Civilization has been the death of me. Beach-combers and pirates make my heart beat high — on paper — but I don't dare even to read about 'em without locking the doors and windows. I could drink blood — but it's got to be currant jelly and water, as my mother used to mix it for me forty years ago. Why, man, I can't come home through the square at midnight without saying 'Now I lay me,' to keep off sandbaggers. As for standing on the bridge like you poets, and rhyming 'hour' and 'tower', it's simply colossal. When I'm out after eleven-thirty, I hold my watch in my hand, ready for the first man that asks. By and by I shall carry a neat japanned tray, to pass it on, as more courteous. Me! I should cut a pretty figure in the South Seas."

"You're not up to it. Aha! but you think I am."

"I don't. I know you're not. But you're young. You're downy. You might make something of yourself if you'd keep the right sort of company — Polar bears, Hottentots, and such-like."

"Are you all here?" asked Warrener, coming forward, his eyes searching the dusk. Seeing there were but three of them, he felt unreasonably hurt. The flavor of his home-coming was lost. Nobody was to blame, yet from sheer nervous recoil he blamed something. Margaret started to her feet.

"Llandaff!" she said softly, but with such intensity that Brandon's heart leaped responsive to the human appeal of it. He got up with a welcoming

"Hullo!" and the two men stood aside to leave Margaret a chance to meet him. She tried to light the gas, but Brandon took the match away from her, and did it himself.

"Glad to see you, my boy," he said, passing Warrener at the door, with a grasp of the hand. "Good-night."

Willie followed, and Llandaff was alone with his wife. She felt suddenly ill at ease, but it was no matter. He did not see her. Dashed by disappointment, Llandaff grew cold and weak, and thought, like a child, of his bed at St. Hilda's. That was a refuge, the only refuge he could remember. The world seemed hateful, and he was cross.

"Where are they all?" he asked fractiously, beginning to wander about the room and touch things, here and there, with nervous fingers.

"I don't know about the others; but Laura is at the Hunt Ball. She hated going."

"Oh!" His spirits dropped still lower, and Margaret, watching him, became alive to her own awkwardness. She had lived with him for years, and suddenly he was a stranger, or more alien even: for the stranger's mood she might have guessed. This man had deliberately closed his doors against her, and she could not force them. She was timid, with that timidity which grows out of our certainty of doing the wrong thing.

"Your room is ready," she said at last. "I'll light the gas." And then, at the door. "I'm awfully glad to see you, Llandaff."

Rid of her, he went into the den and took out two or three of his sketches, for a wondering glance.

They looked unfamiliar to him, like trifles that had belonged to another state of being. His fancy could not compass the amount of energy which must have gone to the doing of work even as good as that. He was bewildered, and like those unused to bodily weakness, he ascribed the change in him to something final and horrible, not to his jangled nerves.

"It's all ready," said Margaret from the door. "May n't I get you something, Llandaff? You're pretty pale. Grog?"

"No, I don't want anything. Good-night."

He went off by himself, and she sat down again. After a time he stopped moving about, and she crept to the door, to listen. Satisfied that he was in bed, she went back to the library, and lingered there a long time, the fire dying down before her. They had passed what seemed at first a tragic deed, one that had loomed before her like death and judgment. It was past, at least one phase of it. Yet it had left no radiance of thanksgiving because he had been saved, but only dumb terror at the thought that they were strangers and must yet live together. Suddenly she heard a cry, "Margaret!" and then again, "Margaret!"

It was his voice. She rushed, breathless, to his room, and found him sitting up in bed, panting.

"Margaret!" he said again, huskily, "I am" — His own brain ended it, "I am afraid!" but his shaking voice said, "I am cold."

She put her arms about him, and drew him, for an instant, to her shoulder.

"Dear!" she said, "dear! you must lie down. Let me cover you."

He yielded to her, and let her draw the blankets over him, while he tried to keep down shuddering breaths that mounted into sobs. These were nervous tremors, the physical reaction after physical strain. But to him it seemed a part of the unaccustomed tragedy about him, the blind force which had of late assaulted him. Margaret left him, to bring him brandy. As she fed him with it, he looked at her wistfully, and asked : —

“ Am I going to die ? ”

“ No, dear, no ! ”

Responsive to his need, her own blood came back to hearten her.

“ But I can't breathe.”

“ You're tired, Llandaff ! you're tired. Drink it down.”

He obeyed her, again like a child, and she put more blankets over him. Then she took his hand, and held it warmly. There was no joy in his nearness ; only a sense of the sweet human kinship that comes of service. They had drifted together to an island, and huddled there on the beach for warmth and company. This was not the solitude of mountain tops where no other soul could come. They were only alone in a common ill. He was in need, and she had something to give him.

The false courage of the liquor ran through his veins to his heart, and he was himself again. He held drowsily to her hand, and slept, while she began to be a little happy, because the world had some slight need of her.

CHAPTER XIX

LLANDAFF AT HOME

NEXT morning Margaret, carrying Llandaff's coffee to him, as he lay in bed, found him eager to protest that he was quite himself.

"You must n't do this, you know," he said, accepting it. "I'm all right. I'm going down town."

She ventured to persuade him.

"Just wait a bit, till Doctor Milbanke comes."

Seen by the morning light, she was shocked by the change in him. He was pale, far paler than he should have been from this short exile. Thrown with a lurch out of life, his old self-confidence had been rudely jostled. He looked apprehensive. A vague something dominated him, something that wore the face of terror.

Margaret's ear was as keen as his to a familiar step. "There's Laura," she said. "Drink your coffee. I'll call her." She hurried out, and found Laura in the hall running over her letters. "Llandaff has come," she announced.

"Ah, so!"

"Go in and see him, Laura, will you? Ask him to lie still. He ought, truly."

Laura shuffled the letters together, and went in.

"Well, old boy," said she, "how goes it?"

He stretched out his hand to her. "Jove!" he said, "I'm glad I've got back. I did n't know how glad. Missed me?"

"I should say so." She sat down by the bedside, and let him keep her hand. Meantime, her eyes sought his in frank appraisal. She wanted to know how much he was capable of, because she was skillful in the guidance of energy, and made nice distinction between the times when it is best to urge or coax. She would never lash a horse uphill.

"Drink your coffee, child," she said. "It's cooling."

"I don't want it. I want" —

His eyes, brilliant with emotion, sought her face and traveled over it. He wanted her, nothing else. If she had not been experienced in temperamental clash and recoil, she would have said the man adored her. As it was, she passed it by, save as power to work a mill. This was only a wave of the universal world attraction between the like and opposite. In itself, it meant nothing. It was a part of the dreariest lie in creation, the old game of seeking and being sought, which the gods have devised for their own uses. It simulated something it was not. It had no market value, save as the clever commercial brain directed it. But she smilingly turned his hand to the coffee cup.

"Drink it," she said, "else I'll go."

He obeyed her, and then she recalled him to the point.

"You've got to get on your feet, you know. At once, old boy! Cræsus is ripe for plucking. Let us gather him ere he be withered."

He frowned over his cup.

"I'm tired of that fellow!"

"So am I, bless you! We shall be more tired before we've done with him. But he's got to be managed."

The old art-worship rose up in him. It was not so much that he remembered how he had felt about selling his facility. It was that he knew how other and better men would feel.

"I wish you would n't put it that way," he objected.

"It's the only way. It does n't hurt the value of your work. You can do swagger things just as well if you're paid for them, — extravagantly, indecently paid."

"His competition closes on the twenty-third. Well, we could be ready for the sacrifice."

"Ready and waiting. Sometimes I think if we could get in the designs, we might squeeze the money out of him in advance. We need it, old boy! we need it now. There never was such a market as there is to-day. Seething! boiling!"

"A market?" He looked at her as dazed as if he had never heard of 'change. Laura mildly despised him. It was childish, being a man, to neglect the chances by which men climb.

"Stocks!" she said briefly. "If we had that lump of money, we could turn it in, and realize on absolute certainties: double it, treble it. Every day we have n't it is a fortune lost."

He felt pushed and worried. She was requiring deeds beyond his powers, and it bothered him.

"But I don't know anything about that sort of thing," he said. "I'm an awful fool over business. You'll find that out."

"Never you mind," said Laura, rising. "There are those who do know. Just keep your mouth shut, and get his prize. I'll tell you how to dispose of it."

She went away full to the brim with determination, her eyes growing hard over spoils. Llandaff caught the reflection, not because he understood her, but because his will had resolved itself into her pleasure.

In the hall she met Margaret, and said, without preamble, —

"Give me an interview, Margaret. Come! about the Minervas and the play."

"Oh, I can't!" said Margaret hastily.

"Think again. The public has a right to you."

"Yes, but not to the Minervas. They are holy ground."

"Very well, then, I shall go up to the chief goddess of all, Mrs. Ben Gilroy, and try to work her. Brandon may be a name to conjure with."

Margaret, going in to Llandaff's room a moment later, found him dressing. He cut her short.

"Don't say anything," he begged peevishly. "I'm going to work. I've got to do it."

So she left him, and presently, to her relief, Doctor Milbanke came. He went into the library with her, and stood a moment holding her hands, to look at her.

"Well, Margaret," said he, "you've got the patient back. You're to be head nurse now."

Her brows lifted a little; she smiled her perplexity.

"I can't keep him still," she warned him. "He wants to go to work. He's getting ready now. Will it hurt him?"

"Bless you, no! not so much as eating his heart out in idleness. Don't let him fret, that's all. Give him his head — when you can't help it."

"He was in a dreadful state last night. He could n't breathe. He" —

"Tired, that 's all, — nervous exhaustion. Oh, if I could get you two young imbeciles away from here ! If I could see you on a boat bound for Nowhere, with nothing to look at but blue water and blank sky ! No books, no spurious ambitions !"

"Ambitions ! you were n't contented till I got mine back !"

"Yes, you ! Not Llandaff, at this stage of the game. He ought to be turned loose. But if he can't be, if he won't, why, don't fret him by coddling. Hullo, old boy ! how are you ?"

Llandaff came in, a little discomfited by his clothes, and the effort to seem at home in them.

"All right, thanks !" he answered, with a feint at courage.

"Going to mind ? Going to take my prescription ?"

"Always. In duty bound."

"Then a sea voyage" —

"Oh, that, no ! I've got to stay right here in my tracks and work. Don't worry me, doctor. If you do, I'll run away."

He looked capable of it, and the doctor mentally withdrew.

"That 's all right," he said, "so long as you run to the proper place, the prairie, the open sea. Ah well ! you must do as you like. Only be reasonable. Don't burn the candle and expect it to last. Take the little tablets, swallow milk and eggs, and remember there 's no jockeying with nature."

Llandaff nodded, with a preoccupied air, and went

off to his drawings. The doctor took his leave of Margaret.

"How is the play going?" he asked, at the door.

"Stupidly some days, and then, when I get discouraged, quite amazingly well."

"Seen Greenfield yet?"

"Yes, doctor, I saw him yesterday. I think he'll give me a chance."

"I think so too. He's a queer Dick. While there was no prospect of getting you, he almost wept over your memory. As soon as the bird hops out of the bush, Greenfield turns his back and looks at the sunset. That's natural."

"He would n't even tell me whether he had leased the Blackfriars for another season or not. 'Talk! talk!' he said, 'all newspaper talk.' And then he looked at me in that cross-eyed way he has, and I said to myself, 'He has leased it, and I'm on his books for leading lady.'"

"Oh, yes! he's leased it fast enough. That's an open secret. And I'm perfectly certain he has in mind a good old-fashioned Shakespearian revival. Keep up your heart, Margaret. The world's your oyster."

Llandaff sat for an hour over his drawings, until his head swam and his pulse grew unruly. He tried to induce in himself the mood for creation, by poring over what he had already done. But that was impossible. He could not follow out the road. It ended blindly in thicket or morass. Whatever clearness of conception he had in the beginning was lost in the fogging of his brain.

CHAPTER XX

OLGA IN BABINE

LAURA, on the track of an interview, went, as she had proposed, straight to Mrs. Gilroy. She sent up her card and was denied. Then she ventured on a penciled message, using Brandon's name and implying a business that would not wait. After some delay, she heard the swish of skirts, and plumed herself on victory. But it was not Mrs. Gilroy who came down; it was Olga Andersen. As she advanced, Laura's quick eye appraised her,—the somewhat redundant beauty, the clothes worn with a grace not of New England, the indescribable air of belonging nowhere in particular.

"Good morning," said Olga. "Mrs. Gilroy is very sorry, but she begs to be excused."

She stood gracious and yet expectant of Laura's going; but Laura stayed.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she said unaffectedly. "I wonder if she quite understood what I've come for. It really concerns her more than it does me. The 'Telephone' wants an interview about the new play. I'm not greedy. Very few items would content me. Somebody's sure to write it up. They may do it badly. Mrs. Gilroy ought to meet me with open arms."

She smiled at Olga, and Olga responded, showing

her pretty, even teeth. She was always on the road to meet kindness halfway.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Gilroy won't consider it," she hesitated. "She was very firm."

They both laughed, Olga with a memory of the impregnable front the dowager had presented, and Laura from a keen intuition of it. But the blood of the born interviewer is slow to cool.

"Perhaps you" — she suggested, but Olga forestalled her.

"Oh, dear, no! she said in haste. "I'm only a companion, — Olga Andersen. I play a little, — the piano. I might be glad to teach it. But at present I'm only Madame Gilroy's companion."

Laura's eyes took in all her points, now with a frank approval.

"Olga Andersen!" she breathed. "Not — do you know Mr. St. John?"

Olga blushed very prettily.

"Yes," she said, with a simplicity that dignified the speech. "We are old friends."

Laura foresaw a combination, and swept the pieces into order. Olga should tell her all she knew about the play, from the inside, and if she did not use the matter then, she might later.

"We live in the same house," she said. "On Merrymount Street. Mr. St. John must have told you about it. We are a merry crew. Come and see us. See me, that is, and I'll present the others."

A rose pink mounted to Olga's cheek. She wanted nothing in the world more than to find out how St. John lived, who were his intimates, and why he was so changed. "Might I come?" she asked, with a child's eagerness. "Oh, I should be so happy!"

"This very evening there will be crackers and beer at one room or another. Excellent fooling, too! Ask for me, Laura Neale. Once there, you are one of us, and somebody will take you home. Good-by. My compliments — my respectful duty — to Mrs. Gilroy. The interview is of no importance, tell her, no importance in the world."

They shook hands in a friendly fashion, and she went down town, leaving Olga in a flutter quite pathetic over so slight a thing. But it seemed a great thing. She had had no pleasures since she came. She was nothing but an old lady's companion in an unfriendly house. How long her tenure would hold, she did not know. But she did know that at the first sign of weakening fealty on the old lady's part, Mrs. Gilroy would send her packing. St. John had come occasionally, and made her duty calls. He was very kind, and quite unapproachable. That had given her a sort of timidity toward him. He seemed to recognize their relationship, and to concede something to it. Yet he conceded nothing, and she was homesick. So many years had they been held by their poor, tacit bond that she had never thought what it would be to see it snapped. She had, deep in her heart, under all that shallow intercourse with prince and potentate, a yearning toward what she still called her "folks." It had made her cling to Jim, and kept her reverent of his memory. St. John was her "folks," too, and his defection hurt.

Laura, hurrying down town to see how the market opened, and then turn her mind toward her every-day routine, was musing over the shifting tide of things. She knew what she meant to do with Olga, and it was

a pleasing side issue to anticipate St. John's embarrassment over this influx of his past life into the present. Out of that, too, some patchwork might be made.

That night they were assembled rather early at the Warreners', all but Teresa, who was reading to her invalid across the square. St. John came later, and found them in full tide of discourse. Llandaff was walking about the room quite ostentatiously, to emphasize his own return to health, and inwardly rebelling because one or two had urged the couch upon him. Laura, to his approval, by no means offered it. She acted on the theory that he must be braced, in order to plunge into the task for which he had been booked. Finally, Brandon took the couch himself, and stretched out at full length, with the design of making Warrener take it later, by force of example.

"Why don't you smoke?" Laura asked him.

"I abstain," said Brandon briefly. "*Entsagen, sollst du, sollst entsagen.*"

"Rule forty-five," said Laura: "nobody shall use a foreign language which is not familiar to every mother's son. German is unfamiliar to me."

"'Thou shalt renounce, abstain, refrain,'" translated Willie.

"Thank you, youngster," said Brandon. "You paraphrase. It simply means, 'I don't smoke!'" Again he had Warrener in mind, who, cut off from all indulgences, longed for them the more. Brandon, in his patient way, had a habit of companioning all sick things, so far as he could. He was perpetually easing people of their loads by a fantastic moral lift. Sometimes they were grateful, sometimes they never

knew there was anything to be grateful for. So, in a fanciful way, he seemed to be walking beside Warrenner in dull self-denials.

"Brandon," called Willie from the window seat, "I'm following your advice."

"Swearing off on verse? Good boy!"

"No! no! I'm going to sea."

"'They went to sea in a sieve, they did!'" sang Brandon and Laura, with one impulse and different tunes.

"I am going to the South Seas," continued Willie, dreamily discordant.

"Where are the South Seas?" inquired Brandon drowsily. "Are you sure you mean the South Seas? Don't you mean the narrow seas Sir Francis Drake objected to? As I remember, they were all too small to contain so great a spirit. South Seas or narrow seas, my boy?"

"I'm going to study life at first hand. I shall go armed" — He drew forth a pocket pistol, and regarded it with fervor.

Brandon came straight upright. "Holy poker!" he bellowed. "Somebody take that thing away."

"It is n't loaded," said Willie.

"Is n't loaded? Was that remark ever made before? Now point it at somebody, and snap the thing, by way of proving it. Point it at me. I'm no good."

Willie held it laxly, and regarded his antagonist from heights of wounded dignity. Brandon rose, tip-toed up behind, with ostentatious caution, and pinned him.

"I advise all citizens of the Republic to march to

the rear," he said. "Follow me. I have the only safe spot in the room. You won't? Stay where you are then. It's at your own risk." He impelled Willie forward, and guided his hand to the table. "There, my boy," said he soothingly; "lay it down there. Lay it down."

"Oh, come now!"

"Lay it down."

Willie obeyed sulkily, and dropped his plaything among the books.

"Ah!" commented Brandon. "Now we can breathe. I don't mind telling you all that this has been the blackest moment of my life. I beg pardon!"

Olga had come in, and Laura was introducing her. Brandon bowed, and Willie went sulkily back to his place. St. John still stood, very pale, but, in expression, committing himself to nothing. As for Olga, she was beautiful with anticipation and the haste of her coming. Her clothes were lovely, and her bare arms and bosom worthy of any setting. She turned from one to the other, pleased as a child. "Oh," she said impulsively, addressing St. John, "what fun this is!"

"How civil of you, — you that come from gilded halls," said Laura, taking away her wrap.

"I don't know anything about the halls, but there's nobody in them. It might as well be a deaf and dumb asylum, for all the company I get. When they give a dinner-party, sometimes I sneak into the dressing-room to look at the cloaks and overshoes."

"When you want fun," said Laura, "come straight to us. It's our specialty: the only reliable brand, made on the premises. Take this big chair, and be comfortable."

Laura, because the occasion and the guest were both her own, was acting the hostess, quite innocently regardless of Margaret, sitting by. But Margaret's mind was on other things. Indeed, in this Republic, you might commit any social lapse arising from a community of interests. No one would challenge you.

They all sat down again, and Brandon, like St. John, wondered why Olga was there. It seemed like an unlucky omen. Laura began at once to weave her web.

"Dear Mrs. Gilroy!" she said to Olga, "how ardent she was this morning! how tropical! She did so long to see me."

Olga laughed with a somewhat scared reminiscence of the atmosphere above stairs. She was not clever enough to present the spectacle of Mrs. Gilroy confronting the daily press, but she remembered it.

"Mrs. Gilroy is quite mad about this play," she said.

"She likes it?"

"Oh, yes! she likes it, but there are a lot of things she does n't like."

"For example?"

"She can't get used to the idea of costumes. She says if her late husband could see his daughter in tights, he'd rise in his grave."

"That shows we don't really want the dead to return," said Brandon, who had been listening, and saw the advisability of switching off Olga before she told everything she knew. "You observe that having the dead rise in their graves is the most undesirable prospect we can think of. If we really wanted them back, we should do the most shocking and indecorous things

to make them rise. The only persons who could n't be budged would be chaps like me, who are n't to be shocked."

Laura, with the pretext of draughts, had drawn Olga off into a corner.

"So Mrs. Gilroy shrinks from tights," she said, with specious interest.

"Yes. She did n't think very much about it till somebody called them fleshings. Then, her daughter said, she reared her crest."

"I know the Gilroy crest," called Brandon, catching the word, "surmounting one and a half demi-ancestors, rampant: motto, 'D. A. R.'"

"But there are n't going to be any men in the audience," said Laura, pinning her victim down.

"No, oh no! but that does n't seem to make any difference. Mrs. Gilroy says it's the principle she minds, her unconscious influence."

"Well, Miss Gilroy can withdraw."

"Oh, she won't! They wrangle over it every morning after breakfast." Then Olga, most innocently glad to be approved, gave a graphic picture of Mrs. Gilroy sitting down to evolve costumes with a dress-maker, "by the day," and mixing historical periods. Laura meantime was packing away every word in her orderly brain. She and Olga had a sequestered air in their corner. Llandaff was wondering why she had withdrawn, but Brandon, glancing at them, saw that Laura had her look of acquisition. She was laying her hands on what she regarded as her particular spoils, and nothing save fire or flood could prevent it. So, as he cared only from that general benevolence which led him to espouse the weaker party, he left Olga to her fate.

Meantime Doctor Milbanke had come in.

"All right, boy?" he asked Llandaff, in passing.

"Right as a trivet," said Warrener, with bravado.

"What is a trivet? That 'll make a 'Note and Query' for the 'Householder.'"

"Doctor," said Margaret, who had followed him in, "I spent two hours with Mr. Greenfield. I did the third act of the 'Queen' for him. Mr. Brandon, do you hear that? He called it great stuff."

"Oh, they always do! I've met them before. Do you know the actor's stock phrase when a play has been snowed under, and you send for it? Chances are he can't find it; but if he does, the secretary chucks it into an envelope and tells you the great man read it with enormous interest, but finds, with regret, that the part is n't quite suited to him. He returns it, wet with tears. Greenfield did n't cry, did he?"

"No, he did n't cry, but he hoped the popular demand would justify his bringing out that sort of thing in time."

"I've no doubt he did."

"What do you want an actor to say when he returns your manuscript?" asked Warrener.

"I'd have him send it with a printed formula, thus: 'You confounded duffer, what makes you think you can write a play? Map out your life in sections. Go on the boards for ten years and find out how the thing is done. Shut yourself up in a cell with a small kerosene lamp and read plays industriously, for ten years more. Then see what you can do for another ten years, and take your failure cheerfully.' Poet, put that down!"

Willie had wandered over to the table, and fingered

his pistol lovingly. He felt for it what is known as a fascination mingled with awe. But as Brandon spoke, he dropped it.

"Weapons?" asked the doctor. "Who's fire-eating?"

"Weapons," returned Brandon grimly, "and unless there are precautions taken to insure their being seen and not heard, I shall be compelled to read the Riot Act."

"Oh, come now, Brandon!" interposed Willie, "you talk about suicide by the hour, and then you balk at a pocket pistol."

"Of course I'm afraid of a pistol. I'm afraid of suicide, too. 'Suicide by the hour!' That's precisely it. Suicide by the job is what terrifies me."

"It takes crazy courage to kill yourself," said the doctor.

"Drunk and crazy both," said Brandon. "I regard suicide myself as I should a most desirable marriage: undoubtedly delightful and altogether alarming. However, this blunderbuss must be disposed of. I can't have my heart in my mouth more than sixty minutes out of an hour. It's disconcerting. Mrs. Warrener, what do you keep in this little drawer?" He laid his hand on the knob of a cabinet.

"Nothing," said Margaret, "nothing whatever. Unless — yes, I believe I tucked some old gloves in there."

Brandon laid the pistol gingerly within. He shut the drawer, locked it, and gave Margaret the key.

"There, boy," said he, "when you actually sail for foreign parts, I'll have the article sent to you at the dock. While you consort with plain men like me,

you'll have to content yourself with yataghans and other simple toys."

"Speaking of suicide," said the doctor, "it's queer, but there's always a blundering fate about it. You can't do it with neatness and reserve. The world has to know."

"I dare say we've all got a way picked out," said Brandon moodily. "Only we're such damned cowards."

"There ought to be clever ways," said the doctor. "They're all so infernally mussy."

Margaret's face sharpened with quick meaning.

"I know," she said impulsively. "Pneumonia, deliberately brought on! iced foot-baths and so forth."

"That's clumsy," said the doctor. "I should pull you through, with much inconvenience to both of us. No, there's but one really specious way."

"What is it?"

"Mushrooms. Make a full repast off the deadly *amanita* and swear you know it's wholesome. You'll die ingloriously and in unspeakable pain, but the public won't suspect you. They'll call you a mycologist."

"Good-evening," came Brownell's voice from the doorway. "Hope I see you all well this evening."

There he was, perennially good-natured, pompous in well-being, and rather embarrassed by smart clothes. He was welcome. They liked him casually, all save Laura, who looked upon him as a potential investment, and Llandaff, on whom he jarred. His coming broke up the groups, and they readjusted themselves. Laura had time for a rapid word with him.

"How are things going?"

"Prime." A certain self-sufficiency born in him of

late, from what he thought his victory over an unfamiliar task, rose and affronted her. Working in mediums he knew, he was simplicity itself. Dealing with unfamiliar quantities, he was another man.

“I have n’t seen the late edition. ‘Hesperides’ up?”

“Holding its own. There’s nothing to worry about. But don’t you get into it. Say, I’ve got something to show you. Can’t I see you a minute alone?”

Olga was by this time talking to Margaret about life abroad, and Brandon was chaffing the men. Laura led the way into the little room, and Brownell followed. He was flushed and eager, and she, seeing it, responded with a heartbeat. Nothing, she thought, should bring that look into the eyes save money or the hope of money. He pulled a photograph from his pocket, displaying it in triumph. Laura looked at the picture blankly, and gave her mind a moment to recover.

“Ah!” she said, not committing herself, and Brownell watched her hopefully.

“My little girl,” he volunteered, warm with pride. “Claribel!”

“Really!” said Laura, with careful appreciation. “What a beautiful child!” But she was wondering what “Hesperides” would do.

“You think you could get along with her?” he asked, with a tenderness she found grotesque. “Ain’t that a nice little girl?”

Emotion had trembled into words, a clamorous emotion that would have to be answered. And she was not ready to answer. Did she want the man? De-

cidedly not, if she could make her way without him. In himself, he was a blot on brilliant possibilities. The time would come for her to conclude whether, for the sake of those possibilities, she would pay the price ; but to-night she was not ready. She gave him back the photograph.

"A dear little girl!" she said warmly. "Now — forgive me, won't you? — but I've got to make some memoranda for an article. Go out to the others and keep things going while I work. Please!" She gave him her hand, frankly and warmly. "That's a dear," she said, drawing him toward the door. "You understand, don't you? I'll be out in ten minutes."

He went, vaguely disappointed, and sat down by Olga, whom Margaret had left for a time, while she brought out crackers and cheese. Olga was listening to Brandon and the doctor, thinking them very brilliant, and regarding Willie, when he joined the talk, as a queer fish indeed. She turned to Brownell with her smile of welcome which never failed to be pretty. Hardly knowing why he did it, he gave her the photograph.

"That's my little girl," he said. Something in his speech recalled the speech of other people who had been dear to her. He seemed by some intangible trick of association her "folks," and she answered in folk speech that had not touched her lips since she tried to fit herself to foreign fashions.

"She's real pretty!"

Brownell warmed.

"She's *good*," said he, "never's given me a minute's anxiety. I lost her mother when Claribel was a baby. You know what that means."

"Yes," said Olga warmly. "I know."

He seemed very kind, this simple-hearted man who put no guard upon his tongue. Olga, who demanded little, had been starved for a long time without knowing it. She could live on tolerance, if it meant also bread and pretty clothes; but she did like to be stroked. As for Brownell, he was embarked on a sea where he had heretofore voyaged alone.

"She's in a private school," he said expansively. "It's the best I could find, the highest price. They're good to her, and they write me tiptop letters; but boarding-school ain't the place for a little girl."

"No," said Olga, "it is n't."

"I mean to take her home before long. If I should make a change, — set up housekeeping, you know, — why, I'd have her home quicker 'n lightning. I would n't ask *her* to do for Claribel." Laura had just come in, and his eyes sought her with an innocent betrayal. He laughed to himself, the pleased half-foolish laugh of a man who finds himself too near the brink of confidences. "Maybe I'd get a governess or something," he added. "I would n't trouble her."

"You might give me a chance," said Olga lightly, speaking on impulse.

He looked at her in a frank surprise. Her personal magnificence had amazed him in the beginning. She seemed rather like a duchess playing a lowly part.

"You're chaffing," he said.

"Oh, no, I'm not," returned Olga. "No, I'm not. I'm a companion now, and I don't know what I shall come to. You'd better think of me." She was rising, and presently she went over to Laura, and said her good-bys.

"But it's the edge of the evening," remonstrated Laura. "We keep all hours here. Don't go."

"I must," said Olga. She knew she need not, that she had cold assent at home to her petition for the evening. "I really must." She was pathetically cowed by St. John's coldness. It took all the flavor out of her little pleasuring. Once she would not have minded, but now she felt a weakening uncertainty — of herself, her own power to charm, and the likelihood of there being anything better in life than there had been. Hope had died out of her, not tragically, but as a matter of fact.

"Let me go round with you," said St. John, rising. "I'll get my hat."

When they went down the stairs together, the door clanged below, and Teresa came up. Olga saw St. John's face when he caught sight of the girl, she at the bottom of the flight, and he above. Instantly she stopped, and put out her foot.

"My shoe, Tom," said she.

He knelt to tie it, and she stood and looked at Teresa coming up the stairs. The girl was absorbed in some thought of her own, and only glanced up incidentally in passing. St. John had risen; he took off his hat, and she gave him a quick little smile. Then she had gone, and Olga thought she knew. When they were in the street, she looked up in St. John's face, and asked with some lingering of the vernacular Brownell had called to life, —

"Mad, Tom?"

For a moment he could not speak. He was choked, suffocated, with the shallowness of his life. Youth had risen briefly up in him because he loved a girl,

but it was a futile striving. He knew it. There was nothing to do with it, because he had lost the habit of doing. Now he could only shoulder his obligation, and pay his old debts. "We'll have a carriage," he said, "there'll be one round the corner."

"No," said Olga, "I'd rather walk." She clung to his arm and they went on. "You did n't like my coming, Tom!"

"You had a perfect right to come."

"But you didn't like it."

"Oh, what difference does it make what I like?" he asked savagely. "I don't like anything. Let's get out of here. Let's marry, and go back to Germany."

It was the avowal for which she had longed, but now, when it had come, it gave her no pleasure.

"Who was that girl we met on the stairs?" she asked perversely. She felt his movement under her arm, but he answered coldly, —

"A singer. She lives in the house."

They went on in silence. Then Olga said, —

"Tom, why don't you tell me things? I know you, like a book. You might as well tell me as have me guess."

He stiffened.

"I've nothing to tell, Olga," he said, and they finished their walk in silence. But St. John, with her here by his side, faced his fate in her, and resolved that when the others went down to Matlock, he would not be among them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HOUSE AT MATLOCK.

"I WON'T go," said Brandon. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and they were waiting in the hall for the carriages Brownell had insisted on sending to take them to the train. They were to have their week at Matlock; but Brandon, having packed his pipe and books, rebelled. "It's a fool's errand," said he. "I won't go."

"Oh yes, you will," said Laura. "Cresus has got up his triumphal arches. The road to Matlock is strewn with roses. Maidens are singing roundelays. A nightingale, in the thicket, has her breast against a thorn. There's a whole ox to be roasted for dinner. Of course you 'll go."

He went on grumbling.

"I was a fool to agree to it. Why does anybody ever go anywhere? When I have my island, I'm going to make a rule that nobody shall be indulged in that fatuous idea of giving other people pleasure. It's a liberty, it's an impertinence. How do you know what will give me pleasure? You let my soul alone. Stop yanking it round, like a calf led to slaughter. Don't you know how they do it? They push the little devil by the shoulders, and twist his tail, to wake him up to the idea of mobilization. That's exactly what's happening to my soul at this minute."

"Ah, don't be hard on Cræsus," said Laura. She sat on the bottom stair of the flight, her hands folded. She was conscious of well-being and the certainty of sway. "He means well by us."

"Hard on Brownell! bless you, I don't mean him. It is n't *his* scheme. It's yours, madam. He's a good fellow. I can eat his salt with an appetite. It's you that have laid the halter round our necks."

Teresa, running down the stairs, came upon St. John at his door. He was about to look over the balusters for a sight of her. She was all alive with the pleasure before her, and his heart quickened.

"Ready?" she asked.

His resolutions, taken anew the night before, came weakly into line.

"I am not going," he said.

"Not going!" Her face fell into blank dismay. She was a lovely and loving child, that he knew; but her pretty way to him had not been so very unlike her way to other people. That he was savage over losing her, he knew also; but it was not yet apparent that her happiness lay in him.

"Do you care?" he asked, in spite of himself.

Her eyes brimmed over. Yet she did not lower them. She looked him in the face with the simple innocence of a young creature who has no arts. He moved nearer her, and put his hands on her shoulders.

"You like me?" he whispered.

"I love you," said Teresa, also in a whisper, not thinking that she had never thought it before. He bent and kissed her lips, and she clung to him.

"I'll come," he whispered. "It will be a later train, but I'll come. Run, dear."

She flushed all over her face and ran down the stairs. He watched her, himself too moved to remember. This seemed like nothing that had ever happened to him, and so to be justified by forgetfulness of rules. Teresa went up to Margaret in the hall, and slipped a hand in hers.

"Let me go in the carriage with you," she whispered. Margaret smiled, and gazed at her in wonder. The sad little creature had left off the mourning of her look. She was alive, glowing.

In the carriage, Margaret turned to her again, and Teresa, meeting the glance, laughed outright, a bubbling laugh, full of audacious happiness. Only Willie was with them, reading absorbedly from a little black book he had picked up at a sale. She threw her hands into Margaret's.

"I'm so happy!" she said.

Margaret thought she understood.

"You've been singing?"

Teresa laughed again.

"No, no!" she answered recklessly. "It isn't my voice. It's because I'm alive. I'm so happy."

Margaret was at the stage when joy seems like a challenge doomed to be accepted by the austere gods. She looked at the girl gravely, but with a forecasting like that of age. For grief, when it touches the soul, has all the effect of years. Certain things we learn by convulsion, certain others through time. It makes no difference. After we have suffered, we are old. Then, since Teresa grew silent, having happy things to think of, she went following on the backward track of her own life. It seemed to her like a dream, quite commonplace, yet full of pain. Everything, at this

time, wore the touch of tawdriness. Great tragedy, as it appeared to her the night when she suffered first, had sunken into a level sea. Then she thought Llandaff was about to die; but he had gone through the operation and come out on the other side, not his old self, it is true, but still walking about among men. He was alternately silent and fractious, a sort of changeling, but his life was going on. He was writing paragraphs for the "Householder," and poring over his sketches, from which something seemed to be holding his hand.

As for her, she lived from hour to hour, not with any great interest in what she did. The woman was still bleeding in her. The artist came alive slowly. She rehearsed regularly with the Minervas, directed them, and tried to throw herself into her part. Yet in that dull environment she got little satisfaction. Then, too, in a hope beyond belief, she worked on some of her old rôles, trusting in a chance word of Greenfield that he might venture on a Shakespearian revival. Sometimes she wondered whether it was all too late, whether she had lost the emotion that ought to vivify her parts, or thrown it into another channel. She did not know enough to analyze the thing and guess that applause was lacking to her, the commendation which is not only sweet in the nostrils, but to the artist his breath of life. She forgot that her art is not an isolated creation like the making of books, but that it lives only by a subtle interchange between itself and the world. The wires on which that music is played stretch from the hearer to the player. They can only vibrate when they are tense and strong. She lacked the approval of those who should approve.

Sometimes at rehearsal, speaking her lines among those high-voiced, trumpeting matrons and athletic girls who left the scene talking over their tailors and their golf, she doubted the sincerity of the lines themselves, and went home disheartened. Brandon, with that feminine trick of his mind, at once guessed it, and himself kept silence. He was acutely ready to disbelieve in himself, and his spirits dropped now that Margaret did not believe.

Brownell had not put up triumphal arches, but he had been magnificent. When they drove from the station along the Matlock road, Laura had her head out of the window, eagerly calling Llandaff's attention to one landmark after another. He did not care, save as she cared.

"I should think you were in the Black Forest," said Brandon. "You look as if you never saw New England. Calm yourself. This is only thirty-eight miles from holy Boston."

"I have n't seen it for years and years," said Laura excitedly. "I would n't come out here — I could n't — while the old house belonged to strangers."

"I don't see much difference now."

"I do!" said her triumphing look, but she only answered, "Cræsus is oriental in his hospitality. What's his is ours."

There was a little stone lodge at the gate, and there lived Margot Sanders and her mother. They were both waiting, Margot with a shawl over her head, the mother in her close peasant's cap. Margot was all smiles. She was very tall, of a magnificent breadth, red and profusely freckled. She had never spoken since her birth, but she and her mother had ways of

communicating, as perfect as they were mysterious. The little old mother was very straight, with a face weazened and parchment brown, the lines crossing here and everywhere. There were so many of them that they had ceased to be significant, save as a map of age. Her black eyes were bright points, so far had they withdrawn. She was the superlative picture of an old woman, but clean, sweet, and full of godly wisdom. Llandaff and Laura called to her warmly, but she did not answer at once. She seemed to be regarding them from some standpoint more authoritative than the ordinary usages of life.

"It's a glad day to see the family back," she said at last, in the treble note of age. "And that's Llannie!"

"This is Llannie, and Llannie's wife is in the carriage behind," said Laura. "How does he look to you?"

"God save us!" muttered the old woman, to herself. She could remember other generations. She saw his dying forbears in his face. On that pious ejaculation, they drove on the winding way to the house, and she appraised the others as their carriage passed. Laura's eyes fastened upon the house, with all the feeling of which they were capable. Margaret, who had never seen it, looked curiously. It was an enormous structure, even for the Georgian period, simple and yet, in its harmony with old New England days, full of a certain grandeur. The trees about it spread luxuriantly. The whole place had from the outside an untended look, but it blazed with light from every window. Brownell was waiting at the steps, to welcome them.

"I'm in the wrong boat," he called to Llandaff. "Seems like an imposition to be here first. It's more your place than mine."

"We'll take possession," said Laura, giving him her hand warmly. "What have you done to it? I can't wait to see."

He was overcome by the delight of having something to give her, something she really wanted. He could hardly greet anybody else until she knew how hard he had tried to please. She ran up the steps, and he followed, talking tumultuously, like a boy.

"I've had it put in order as it was, just as near as I could. I asked old lady Sanders. I've had a man riding round the country to hunt up a pair of andirons that used to be in the west room, and George! I fetched 'em."

She smiled upon him brilliantly, and ran in. He fell back among the others, and acted the kindly host. Brandon had always liked him. He liked him better now, seeing him as he was, with no pretense at perfumed ease. Once within, he approved the house, too, and was glad to be there. "Jove!" he said admiringly, "the hall's as big as a barn."

Couples had danced there in the old days. It ran from front to back, and the carved staircase ascended with some magnificence, a great landing and a turn midway. The rooms on either side had blazing fires, and the light flickered on old furniture that had been polished within the month. The air was sweet with flowers. That was perhaps Brownell's only mistake. He did too much. With opulence and beauty at his hand, he was inclined to shower them. Laura was right, in the main. He had done the triumphal procession act, so far as he could compass it.

Laura paid no attention to anybody, but went sweeping through the house, in a spontaneous delight she seldom felt. Brownell, having disposed of the others, followed her, refulgent with her joy. But he detected no difference, save in degree, between that and her pleasure in former things he had done for her. She had counterfeited so long that it would have taken a wise person to analyze her pretense of gratitude. They had gone into the old library, and her hands darted here and there over the shelves.

"The same books even!" she said. "What possessed those people to change the place so little?"

"They never lived here, really, you know," said Brownell. "Bought the place, shut it up, and went off to Europe. Like it, do you?"

"I like it very much," said Laura, — "very much."

"Ah, well," said he jocosely, his eyes seeking and claiming her, "I guess it's you that wants the place, — not Warrenner."

Laura sometimes overdid her pose of seeming to desire nothing even from the people who could give her most. She had asked him to make money for her, it was true, but she had tried to counteract that self-seeking ever since by an ingenuous lack of urgency. "No! no!" she said hastily. "I don't care for it, except in a certain way. Perhaps my cousin does n't either. You'd better keep it in your own hands — for the present." Keep it, said calculation, until I decide whether it will be better to wheedle it out of you, or take it with the enormous sop of you thrown in.

While they were at dinner St. John came. He was shown at once to the table, where Brownell wel-

comed him boisterously, and put him beside Teresa. Laura, who had seated the guests, had kept the place for him. One person, she knew, was ready to be pleased with the Guardsman, and, though he spoke but ten words a day, would never find him dull. St. John, under some new resolve, looked young. He had put away every deterring thought, and set out on a course he had not planned, but so beguilingly charted that it seemed divine. Teresa did not look up; still he fancied her hand trembled a little, and even that brought him a message.

"I got the next train," he said stupidly, yet as if it were very important.

"Yes," said Teresa, "I thought you would."

The words sounded like a confidence, a new avowal.

Later in the evening, when the others were talking in the library, Teresa went into the room across the hall, and at the piano played little snatches for them to hear. St. John withstood the appeal until he could delay no more, and then followed her. She was sitting in the dusk with the firelight leaping about her. St. John's heart choked him. Hope and desire had long been over for him. He thought he had learned the tawdriness of certain emotions; yet here was life flooding back again with an unimagined freshness, bringing him the well-beloved. He was all forgetfulness; for when being rises to such a pitch, it commands us to forget. "You may remember," it warns us, "in good time. Do your repenting then. Now I am life. I am irresistible, invincible. Relinquish everything but what I bring."

"Are you glad I came?" he asked.

Her fingers did not bungle, but she could only nod without speaking.

"I can't see your face. Speak! Tell me! Are you glad?"

"Yes. I am glad."

"Keep on playing." He brought a chair, and sat, so that he could look into her face. "I want to talk to you. Is it true? Do you like me?"

The arrogance of happiness awoke in her, and at once she gained the power of coquetry. He felt her atmosphere, not all yielding, but full of pricks and spurs, and the instinct of possession rose in him the more. She had seemed an intense but colorless creature; now he began to suspect what her reserve covered, — the quick responses to a thousand moods.

"I told you," she said at last.

"Tell me again."

"I can't. You're a beggar. You don't buy."

"Oh, *that*? You want me to say it? I do. I love you. Darling!"

In the next room Brandon, from his chair in the corner, was asking, "Where's St. John?"

"In there with Teresa," said Laura, by the fire.

Brandon gave a smothered exclamation, and Margaret, who was near him, said, —

"That displeases you."

"Immensely."

He always told her the truth, because her nature laid demands upon him.

"Is n't it a good thing?"

"It's a very bad thing."

"Why?"

The others were talking with animation loud enough to cover confidences, but unless he should be forced into it, Brandon had no idea of speaking plainly. So

he brought out one of what he called his nine or ten masquerading selves, and made him do the talking. This was the plausible self, the one who turned axioms inside out, and set stupid wits agape with acrobatic vigor.

"Nothing but mishap could possibly come of it," he said dogmatically, — "nothing!"

"But why? If he cares about her?"

Margaret did a good deal of futile speculating, at this point in her life, over the passion of love. It moved the world she saw, but it hurtled about like an irresponsible force, a child with a giant's strength. There was no reason in it.

"Those two people are in absolutely different zones. How many years are there between them? Fifteen? Twenty? Never mind. Life is an old story to him. He's got through with a lot of things she never even heard of."

"Ah, but if he loved her!"

"We can't pluck fruit in January. Look at me! I'm at that same desiccated age. Suppose I fell in love with a girl of twenty, twenty-three, whatever this girl is. She has, emotionally, a certain set of wants. They've come down to her from her arboreal grandmother, and if life does n't meet them, life is a villain. She has every right to bid me treasure her slipper and wrangle for her glove. Now to me, a slipper is merely a covering for the foot. As food for emotion, I don't care anything about it. Nor do I care about being 'a glove upon that hand!' I'd rather sit in the stalls, and 'let them rave' over it, unless they'll give me a good rattling farce-comedy instead. Locks of hair are only untidy things, to clutter up a drawer. Writ-

ing every day is a bore, sending flowers requires a memorandum unless you leave a standing order with the florist, photographs are superfluous, and jealousy upsets the liver."

"But you write about it!" said Margaret, rather bitterly. She resented the reduction of life to its lowest terms.

"Write! Bless you, yes. I could write about ancestor worship. But I can't feel it, or anything else that takes trouble."

"So a man of his age could never make a young girl happy! Is that what you'd say?"

"No! no! I won't be rash. It depends on his temperament, on the amount of bluff he's capable of. He might even keep it up for years. But some day it would crumble—I being the man. I should lead my partner to a seat, make a low bow, and tell her I'd enjoyed the pleasure."

"And find another partner!" The betrayal was involuntary, and it sobered him.

"I hurt you," he said. "I do sometimes. You want things to be real, solid. You want them to have three dimensions. This kind of talk offends you. But it does n't mean anything. It passes in some circles for conversation. You would n't think it, but it does."

"I'm a dull sort of person," said Margaret, offering her little apology in turn. The tears were in her eyes. She felt, as she often did of late, that life was an intricate sort of game, which she did not in the least know how to play. It would not matter if she could withdraw; but she had to stay fumbling over the pieces and making false moves. All the prizes

were lost, too, — even the hope of them. And it must be because she was stupid.

“Let me tell you what you are,” said Brandon, in swift atonement. “You are heavenly-minded. You exalt us. You burn some sort of incense, and see us through the cloud of it. We look like gods. But we are not gods. We are at the mercy of this planet. It shackles our feet, and you can’t really get us away.”

In the next room Teresa was striking great chords, as if they were flowers torn up by the root and thrown down in a bruised fragrance. The music, the inexplicable call of life, affected Margaret like a pang, and she felt the great overmastering of pain, — the pain of being.

“It’s a mistake,” she said, “a mistake. I make nothing but mistakes.”

“No,” said Brandon, “it is n’t a mistake, — save as it hurts you. It’s divine. If there is any god in us, your unwearied call keeps it from dying. Only — you can’t escape the pain of bringing it to life. You can’t escape, you women, when you’re good. Life is perpetual travail for you, the bringing things to birth. It is not a mistake.”

CHAPTER XXII

FALSE DAWNINGS

TERESA woke at four o'clock, the next morning, as if her happiness touched her softly and bade her be alive. When we are wretched, the spectre waits all night, to clutch us at the dawn. When we have won at the great game, joy shakes us gently, whispering, "Arise! These moments are few. Do not waste them." So the girl came awake in the unfamiliar room, and caught her breath deliciously, at memory of the night before. She had not been so happy in all her little life, not even when her voice buoyed her above its meagre conditions. Her voice was forgotten in a keener joy. She clasped her arms about herself in the dark, and loved herself because she was beloved. Life was sweet in her nostrils. She was vaguely exhilarated, and welcomed the delight of it, hardly longing to see St. John again, because her own unproven bliss was enough to feed upon. She lay there in the dark and thought about him. The touch of his lips was upon her yet. She could taste them. Keen pleasure of the flesh came upon her, but so rarefied that it mingled like one potency with the spirit.

When the light came, she grew impatient of inaction, and got up and dressed. Then she slipped

downstairs, and found that somebody had been having coffee there. Two empty cups stood on the dining-table, with the urn and some rolls and butter. Breakfast was to be late, but Brownell, true to the habits of his working life, had forestalled it. Teresa poured herself coffee, and took it, with some bread. So fortified, she put on her hat and jacket, and went out into the spring world. The weather was prematurely warm. It was the false dawn of the year. There was a moist gray-blue air, and the trees were wet and black. Crows were cawing, and the sky even had that indefinable look of winter past. Without knowing where her steps might lead her, she went down the driveway, and walked on to the lodge. Margot saw her from the kitchen window, and came out, hungry for crumbs of company. She had been alone with her mother all winter, the silence wherein she dwelt intensified by no outer life to watch.

"Good-morning," called Teresa, forgetting her infirmity; but Margot smiled and beckoned her so eagerly that Teresa followed her into the lodge, where there was a gay little sitting-room blossoming in tidies and presided over by St. Joseph on the mantel. Beyond that was the kitchen, with a wooden floor scoured to the grain, coppers on the mantel, and a dresserful of blue and lustre ware. On one side of the fireplace sat the little old woman, tied up in her cap, a short pipe in her mouth. In the other nook Brandon was smoking the mate to the pipe. At sight of Teresa, he got up, but only to draw forward a little stool for her. He did it hastily, as if not wanting to change the current of the moment.

"Here 's another one of us, mother," he said.

The old woman interrogated Teresa piercingly. She took the girl's hand in her own brown one, and examined it, back and palm. Then she gave it a little pat and laid it on Teresa's knee.

"It's a good hand," she said, "a good hand."

"Is mine a good hand?" asked Brandon, stretching it out, muscular, square-tipped, and full of life.

But she would not scrutinize it. She looked him in the face instead, and said, as if she loved him, "You're not like the other lads. You're a dark one, a stranger, and always will be."

Brandon gave a quick little breath. He was a stranger, he felt, to this particular planet and its ways of doing things. Either she guessed that, or she read his mind and its interpretation.

"Own up, mother!" he said, recalling her to what they had been saying when Teresa came. "You do believe in the Little People."

"There's no such thing," said the old woman. She watched him, fascinated, aware that he would get her secrets out of her. She knew what she believed, and knew he knew it.

"Did n't you ever see one?" said Brandon, unmoved, "a fairy, a pixie, a leprechawn?"

"No, nor you, nor any man," said Mother Sanders. "Indeed, not I!"

"But you know people that have seen them."

"There's not a living soul this day that has seen the like."

Brandon was paying attention to his smoke, and apparently none to her.

"But they bewitch the cream in the churn," he said carelessly.

She fell into the snare.

"Ay, that they do!" she cried with vigor. "Why, I mind it was the year I was ten, there was a neighbor — an evil man he was, too — he came and borrowed our churn. And next time we churned in it the butter would n't come. Ay, it never came. And no butter ever came in that churn after. And we split it up into firewood, that we did. It was my father that did it."

"Ay," said Brandon, gazing ruminatingly at the fire, not at her, and smoking away, "the Little People! But some have seen them."

The old woman leaned forward, and put her hand on Teresa's knee. She had to touch some one for the human encounter of confidence. But she looked at Brandon.

"My mother told me," she said, "that when she was coming home at four o'clock in the morning, from watching with Granny Hartnett, and her the next day a corpse, she saw the meadow all full of Little People dancing, and they no bigger than a sixpinny doll. My mother turned about and went the other way. But Billy Hartnett, he was my mother's cousin, he saw them and was never the same man since."

Her face fell into musing. It did not yield to vacuity, but shut closer, as if the wrinkles tightened on themselves.

"Are there any fairies here?" asked Teresa.

"No, no, my dear," said the old woman dreamily. "Ireland is a very old country."

"What did you see in the young lady's hand?" asked Brandon suddenly.

The old woman lay back in her chair and smoked. "Grief!" said she.

Brandon started. The word, so spoken, was dramatic. Teresa smiled. She could defy augury. "What kind of grief?" she asked.

"Grief!" said the old woman again.

"In that case," said Brandon, rising, "we must give her all the pleasure we can. Come, Child, run along the avenue with me, and then we'll go in to breakfast."

Mother Sanders took no more notice of them, and Margot followed them to the door.

When they were outside, Brandon looked at Teresa to note how she had received the foolish prophecy, — foolish, but emphatic enough to move him, if only from its restraint. But Teresa's color stayed unchanged. Her eyes, fixed now on some far-off point she did not see, were full of light. She was, he realized, feeding upon meat he knew not of.

"Suppose we go down the road a piece," he proposed. "That's what they say where I came from. Will you?"

"Yes. It's ever so long to breakfast."

They turned into the country road roofed by a tracery of elms.

"I can't place that old woman," said Teresa. "She's neither Irish nor English, nor anything else. Her speech is n't brogue. It's only queer, and suggests something, you don't know what."

"She explained that, this morning, during our smoke," said Brandon, "before we got to the Little People. She came over here from Ireland, a young girl, and served as maid to one of the Matlock gentry. Then she married a Prince Edward Islander, and, I dare say, got tricks of speech from him."

"Why would n't she own to the Little People?"

"They won't, when they really believe in them. You must speak of them respectfully, but it's better not to speak of them at all. Smells good here, does n't it? Smells of mud!"

"Heavenly!"

Teresa thought in superlatives now. She stood still a moment, and sniffed at the spring wind. Brandon looked at her while she looked at the sky. Her mind was as far from him as if she had never met him at all. He noted the clear eye, the delicate bloom of her cheek, and thought how complete a little creature she was, unspoiled, ready to love and to be loved.

"You are very much to be envied," he said, in spite of himself.

Teresa turned to him. She was recalled. Her face dimpled all over.

"I know it," she said. "But how did *you* know?"

"You've got it all," said Brandon, "youth, hope, certainty, all in your pocket. But it'll only last a minute. Enjoy your minute."

"It will last forever," said Teresa defiantly. His tone saddened her more than the words, though they trod relentlessly on the heels of the old woman's prophecy, Grief. "It won't be just the same, but it'll be very nice."

"Oh, no!" said Brandon, "it is like that other girl dancing at the ball. In a few minutes it will strike twelve, and then where are you?"

She looked at him defiantly for an instant, before her face fell and her mouth sobered.

"Why do you want to spoil it?" she asked gravely.

"Spoil it, Child! God knows I don't. Only I want you to remember that the clock will strike. Keep listening for it. I thought it would always be eleven-thirty. I did n't have time to get out of the ballroom before everybody saw my rags."

"What happened to you?" asked Teresa quite simply, and yet with some sternness, as if he had taken liberties with her and she had a right to echo them.

"My dear," said Brandon, "I loved a woman. I loved her for a great many years."

"Did she love you?"

"No, Child."

"Did she love somebody else?" It was like an audacious bird sitting on his finger and looking up to ask bold questions.

"No," said Brandon, "she never loved anybody. She lied to us — to me, to the other man, to herself. Her heart was as hard as a stone."

To hear the silent man talk about himself was shocking to her. He was telling without emotion things which must have caused him terrible emotion years ago.

"I am sorry," she said.

"Oh, don't be sorry! It was my appointed way. But I took it hard, took it too hard. It has prevented me from loving anybody else."

Teresa was all revolt, the revolt of youth and happiness.

"You could care again," she said. "People do."

"Oh no, I could n't! any more than you could use a palsied arm. I've tried, over and over. I tried to love you."

"Me!" She was crimson with wonder. It was novel enough that one man should have loved her. That another should even have hesitated over it made a second marvel.

"You had, at one time," said Brandon meditatively, "a better chance than anybody I've met in the last ten years. I thought you were getting there. Then, one day, I forgot all about you, and I knew you'd lost your job."

"Oh, I never thought" — began Teresa.

"No, that was one beauty of it! You were as unconscious as a bird in a bush. I had a good time while it lasted. I played all sorts of games with myself. I tried to be good, for your sake, like a schoolboy. I'm trying that, still. I never did it just that way for anybody. But you need n't worry."

Teresa, confused as she was, could not forbear looking at him. He seemed entirely unmoved, but his face was very sad. The patient lines about his eyes struck her as they never had before. She saw him in the light of what he had confessed, and she was sorry.

"I wish —" she said, and then stopped. She wished he could be happy. It seemed easy enough, with so much happiness about. Brandon turned to her with his quick, illuminating smile.

"Don't!" he said, "don't waste a minute wishing. Only you see what a peculiar relation ours is. I almost liked you. That means you've got a certain claim on me. If ever you want a roc's egg, you tell me, and I'll get it for you."

Teresa could not speak. She did not know any answers for this queer man who was all tenderness

and cynicism. They walked back to the house, and found things there in full swing. The sunlight flooded it, flowers bloomed everywhere, and the smell of breakfast was in the air.

"Where have you been?" called Laura, as they entered the dining-room.

"We've been a-Maying," said Brandon, pulling out Teresa's chair and seating her. "Corinna was on the way, and I persuaded her to take me. We've seen a morris dance, Jack-in-the-Green, and other delectables. Next time perhaps you'll come along. Slug-a-beds!"

"By Jove! we could have a morris dance, in six weeks or so," cackled Willie, eating eggs and drinking very strong tea, "and a Maypole!"

"Where did you go?" asked St. John of Teresa.

She told him, while he looked at her jealously.

"We'll have a walk after breakfast," he said, "if you're not too tired, — you and I."

Laura was in unquenchable spirits. She sat opposite Brownell and poured coffee, meantime telling stories about the people who had lived here, in the old days, and challenging Llandaff to remember more. He was not responsive. Family details were nothing to him, and Laura, when others were sharing her, gave him no sort of pleasure. Brownell was agape with delight and admiration. Her vivacity intoxicated him. He did not want her to himself. He longed to exploit her brilliancy and let the world look on and wonder. He saw her, in a figure of speech, always at the head of his table.

Margaret, beside Brandon, was very silent. She wore a soft gray dress, and looked ethereal in it. He

caught himself wondering whether she had the fire to play as he felt she could have played, or whether life had at last destroyed her.

"Is it going well?" he asked, unable to resist his own besetting interest.

"The 'Queen'? I'm not sure. I'm at the dead point. It sags."

"Then don't tell me."

"Should you care very much?"

"Care if it failed? Mrs. Warrener, I am afraid I should."

He laughed shamefacedly. He did care about his play, perhaps more hotly than if he believed more in himself and it. Besides, he shrewdly guessed she was at the point where some human touch would hearten her again. It did. She quickened at his tone.

"Come upstairs to the billiard room," she said, "and hear me do some of it."

CHAPTER XXIII

A BARGAIN

BRANDON was due in town, but Laura, by dint of arranging, had the day, and Llandaff, delving for the "Householder," could always plan his time with more or less freedom. Brownell, who had conceived an attachment for Brandon, was afraid he might escape without finishing his visit.

"Now you will come back?" he implored, when the carriage was at the door. "You 'll come, won't you?"

"Of course, of course!" returned Brandon, with a fictitious warmth. "Only too glad!"

He had previously resolved on slinking back to his rooms for one night's immunity, but the other man's preference decided it. If Brandon found he could give pleasure, he was lost. He went doggedly about it, bored but persistent, wondering why on earth anybody was so misguided as to like him.

Brownell returned to the house, and sought out Laura in the library. She was before the fire, her feet stretched out in slippered comeliness. The rich man was happy. He knew his wealth could buy him much, though this woman was not for a moment included in such magnificent barter. Her he meant to get through the medium of kindness, though he glowed in the certainty of what money could bring

her. Now he threw a log on the fire, and watched the flames rising above it.

"Having a good time?" he asked.

Laura clasped her hands above her head, and stretched herself sensuously. At that moment she loved the world, the warmth of it, the ease, and loved herself supremely, the atom that received such waves of pleasure to pulsate in return.

"Yes," she said, "I am having a good time."

Brownell kicked at the log, and sent the sparks up splendidly. Laura felt his atmosphere, and woke to meet it. She was not yet ready to be asked the question that was imminent.

"How do you dare to leave this market?" she asked briskly.

He was congealed.

"I guess the market will take care of itself for a day or two," he answered, sitting down.

"It may not take care of you. You've bought on a margin now, have n't you?"

"Yes."

"How much 'Hesperides' are you holding?"

He told her. Laura opened her eyes.

"Well," she commented, "you certainly are a plunger."

Brownell put his finger tips together. He wore the self-satisfied look of the man who plumes himself on certainties. To Laura his confidence seemed fatuous. It exasperated her.

"They'll take care of me," he said.

"They'll take care of themselves. Nobody else!"

"Yes, but that includes me."

"How do you know?"

Brownell nodded sagely, because no other answer was possible. He did not know, but he was under that particular madness which has made chance a special providence.

"It's pegged at a hundred and ten," he volunteered.

"Very well. But you'll be a wise man if you sell out and take your profits."

Brownell grew fractious, because reason, at least, was on her side. For hot blood there is no defense, save in results, and the result was yet to come. He was assured that in a month's time he should look at her, and say, "You see I was right." Meantime he could not convince her. She must wait, as he was waiting.

"I can't sell," he insisted. "Don't you see I can't? Would you have me step out and leave them floundering? You think they're using me. Would you have me play a dirty trick on them?"

She came bolt upright, struck, for the first time, by the simplest solution possible.

"Have you thought," she said, "that they're selling out that mine on you?"

He took her hand, and stroked it. "My girl," he said tenderly, "folks have ill-used you, one time or another, or you never'd be so suspicious. Those fellows are as honest as the day."

"Are they? Do you remember the great railroad deal three years ago this very spring? Your two Hookers carried that through."

"No, I don't remember it."

"No? Well, it's a moving story. I'll tell it to you some time when I've got my facts together. They took a lamb no tenderer than you, and fleeced him."

Brownell smiled at her indulgently. "They won't fleece me," he said.

"I don't know."

Laura was very grave. If he had no more head-piece than this, no matter how much money was behind him, she would not have him. He was not to be trusted. Millions were of no use if they might be thrown into the gutter. At first she had believed in the weight of her own influence, but now she wondered. His vanity tickled, he was very much like any other man assured of a man's supremacy.

"I don't see," she said, "how you could have been in business so long, and kept yourself so soft."

Again he smiled at her.

"I know business men through and through," he said indulgently. "That's precisely what I do know. I can read these fellows like a book."

She gave up then, and returned to feminine persuasion.

"You do of course," she said warmly; "you must. How else could you have succeeded? When people talk about self-made men, I point to you. 'Look at him,' I say." She drew her hand away, leaving him the honey of her words. Brownell flushed in honest pride. He spoke huskily.

"I don't deserve so much as that. Honest, I don't. I thought some day, when Claribel grew up, maybe she'd like to look back and see how her father rose from the ranks. But to have you proud of it, too" —

Laura smiled warmly at him.

"Of course I'm proud of it," she said softly. Then, to forestall a more intimate conclusion, "Are n't we having a cosy visit here?"

"First-rate. Like it as well as you expected?"

"Better. That was genius, your snapping the house up as you did under Randall's nose."

He laughed the low, pleased laugh of one who accepts tribute knowing it to be just.

"Randall spoke of that, only the other day," he said. "Asked if I felt inclined to sell. He'd pay a fancy price."

"What did you say?"

"Told him I guessed I'd hang on to it. If ever I wanted to dispose of it, I guessed it might as well go back into the family."

Laura laughed, in her turn, delighted. She loved power and the insolence it fostered.

"He is one of the crowd down there," she said meditatively.

"Yes, hand in glove with the Hookers. Come in, Warrenner."

Llandaff appeared at the door, and hesitated. "Come in," insisted Brownell. "Always room for one more."

Llandaff did come in, and the two men went to the window, drawn by the tantrums of a horse led up and down the drive.

"By George!" Brownell called out, and ran to help the groom. Laura rose in her chair, and looked at Llandaff.

"Llannie," she said, "come here."

At the hurry of her voice, with the old childish name, his own heart quickened. He took the chair Brownell had left, and she put her hands on his shoulders. He flushed with the joy of it.

"Llandaff," she said rapidly, "for God's sake, fin-

ish your drawings and submit them to that fool within the week."

Llandaff had the ordinary decencies of feeling, and at another time he might have winced at hearing his host decried. But he caught the contagion of her earnestness. He also thought Brownell a fool. He passed over the word, and looking at her, put up his hands to hold her wrists.

"Don't talk about drawings," he said.

"I must. I can't talk about anything else. If we got that man's prize money I could double it, treble it. I don't dare think what I could do. We should be rich."

Even under the dominion of her touch, he cooled. The springs of life were low in him. He shrank from work, lest it convince him how poor a thing he had become.

"I can't, Laura," he said hoarsely. "I don't believe I can. Since that damned operation, I have n't been the same man."

He had not owned that before, even to himself. Since he loved her, he could confess it to her only, and it came agonizingly, but dowered with a certain relief. It was like a sob in the throat, rending and yet bringing peace. But to-day she had no comfort for him. She looked him in the eyes.

"You must," she said. "Landaff, you must."

"But if I can't?"

"Dear, can you let me beg you for anything and not give it to me?"

"No! no!" he whispered. "No. If I do it, Laura, will you — oh, don't you love me?"

Brownell, on the lawn, still watching the horse, distracted her gaze, and forced her into speech.

"Yes! yes!" she said.

Llandaff took her hands down from his shoulders and looked at her in a savage joy. He had chosen. He was a dastard and he was glad to be. But he could not bear her nearness lest he give way to that ever-present childishness that hung about him, urging him to cry upon her breast. Even if she loved him, he must not let himself be weak. The very greatness of his treachery seemed to call forth some spurious manhood from him. He walked to the window, looked in his turn at Brownell, and came back.

"Laura," he said, "I'll do it. Sit for me this afternoon. And if I do it — Laura, if I'm free, will you come with me?"

"You know," she said. "I don't need to tell you."

Her steadiness sobered him anew. It seemed the calmness of a great resolve, rousing within him that false hatred of all bonds which have grown heavy. He saw them both doing what was higher than the law, because they had the courage to shake off the law. He came and stood a moment behind her. "God bless you!" he said. It sounded hysterical to Laura, whose sense of humor was quite free to override emotion. To her mind, God was the conventional idol set up to uphold conventional rules. They had agreed to kick over the rules, and he was calling upon the idol to bless them. She rose and faced him, speaking rapidly.

"We understand each other. We can't talk. We want money. We've got to have it."

His own better mood weakened, and gave place to the cheap counterfeiting of the man who explains.

"We must have money," he agreed faintly. "For

— for Margaret, too. Laura,” he added, forestalling what she might say, “I’m not such a devil as you think me, about—about Margaret. She does n’t care. See how glad she is to go back to the stage. She does n’t care.”

It had not occurred to him before, but his coward self put forward the first plea it found. Laura, looking at him dispassionately, with a well-simulated warmth, despised him, not so much for his treachery as for his self-deception.

“This afternoon,” she said, smiling, “the last two figures. We won’t talk about the other things until we’ve earned them.” She gave him her hands again with such abandon that when he carried them to his lips, he knew she meant them to be there. He had not seen such warmth in her. It turned him dizzy, though her strength still challenged firmness. He felt heroic in her shadow.

“God bless you!” he said again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A BROKEN CHARM

ST. JOHN, since new life had touched him, seemed another man. He had been so long inert that even an ill resolve gave him some dignity. Now he laughed and jested until the others wondered, and Teresa looked about her proudly. He even sang romantic German ballads with a creditable voice, and Laura clapped him on the back. He and Teresa were together every waking moment. They talked, as lovers do, of their meeting and the wonder of it, of days past and other days to come. Teresa went over her short life with its thin joys and griefs, like the tinkle of a brook, while he marveled at its purity. He was not tempted to talk about himself, because, as he realized with bitterness, there was little in his past that tempted to display. The intimate part of it was very tawdry and poor. He did not even linger over the details of his years abroad, although she questioned him about Germany and the music there. But his mind was not dwelling on those bygone years. Nothing seemed real to him save this one relation. All his impulses surged toward the future, to live there in unimagined well-being nourished by the new blood of life. He would not think of Olga. He only knew he meant to live as other men lived, not

like a coward. Not even to himself did he say that, to begin a new life, he must break old bonds and rehabilitate himself at the expense of some one else. He wanted life. He would have it, and life lay beside Teresa. Her unworldliness seemed to him something ineffable. He did not make plans, even for her, or say to himself, We will marry. Knowing only that she had, with a splendid confidence, put her hands in his, he resolved that all should be well for her. The first thing he had said about their future, as if it were one, was on a day when they stood by the window, looking off into the west.

"You'll have to get over that nonsense about your voice," he said with that tender mastery so divine to women.

"Why?"

"It is n't lost, Child. You're going to have all sorts of things, — rest, travel, doctors. They can make a new girl out of you. You are only a baby. Your voice will come."

She looked at him adoringly. There was no difficulty in believing it. He had brought about magical things already, and he could easily compass more. She laughed outright in sudden happiness.

"Come and run down the drive," she challenged him.

They went, along the driveway and into the woods, where the snow was gray and water trickled everywhere. A branch knocked Teresa's hat on the back of her head, and she left it, showing her hair curling in little tendrils. Her face wore the flush of apple-bloom and arbutus. She looked delicate and yet strong with the strength that sends down roots and

makes the rose as healthy as the oak. Now, with the fickle absorption of a child, she entered into the life of the woods and seemed to forget St. John. A squirrel ran chattering up a pine, and she forsook the cart-path to chase him from tree to tree. She found little tracks in the melting snow, and got excited over the stories they told of furry creatures.

"You're nothing but a child, are you?" he said fondly, when she came back to him, and let him take her hand while they went on together, talking eagerly.

To St. John, it was a new and exquisite pleasure to be with anything so unchanged by the world and its poor strivings. He felt as we all do in relation to a harmonious and perfectly natural creature, as if he had come home at last. We touch the roots of things. We are sane and good.

When they came into the hall, the peace and security of the place fell upon Teresa like a spell. She had not been used to luxury, only, all her life, bare little rooms kept by the work of her own hands. But now the party had scattered. Those who had gone to town had not come back. The others were upstairs. In this week-day twilight, a Sabbath stillness brooded. You could hear the austere ticking of the clock and even the purring of low fires. The scent of flowers lay delicately now, for Laura took care not to have them too prodigal. Teresa stopped in the hall, exalted by a beauty which her mounting passion translated into a beauty higher still. She was one of those who feel the spirit of things real. She lifted her face to St. John, her lips parted.

"Oh," she said, "I am as happy as if you had given me this!"

"But I did n't give it to you," he said, smiling down on her. "I did n't."

She still looked at him. He had a dim comprehension of the woman's attitude of referring all joy to her natural head. It made him humble, and he kissed her. Teresa ran upstairs to take off her hat, and saw, through the open door, Margaret, sitting by the fire, doing nothing. Margaret called to her, and when the girl went in, put out her hand and drew her nearer.

"You don't mind being hugged, do you?" she asked. "It's because you're such a radiant little party. Nobody knows but I might catch it."

Teresa slid down to the floor, took off her hat, and laid her arms across Margaret's lap. Then she put her head on them, and looked into the fire.

"I am happy," she said. "I could dance for joy. I could dance till I died."

Margaret dropped a hand on the dark hair, and smoothed it. She felt a strong and unbelieving curiosity about happiness.

"You like the country," she said.

"Yes," answered Teresa dreamily. "I like the country."

"And you are young!"

"Oh, yes, I'm young," said Teresa, smiling, and stretching her hand to the blaze, not because she was cold, but to get more warmth and glow. The fire burned her cheek, and she liked it. All the touches of elemental nature were satisfying to her. "I was younger six months ago," she said drowsily, "but I was n't happy."

Still Margaret stroked her hair. She guessed now, and guessing, she could not question. Presently

Teresa sat up, and let the caressing hand fall from her hair.

"I should like to tell you," she said, in a peculiarly sweet voice. "But I can't tell you, — no, I can't." The intimate nature of her relation with St. John was very strong upon her, yet with the instinct of one woman with another, she wanted to share it. She had been so long lonely that now, under great emotion, all the tides of life rose and swept her on with them into human channels. And chiefly she was proud. In her guileless lack of human intercourse, she had never noticed that the others thought slightly of him. He seemed, in his general air of good breeding, to exceed them all, and now in her pride she longed to say, "He is mine."

"You need n't tell," said Margaret. "Whatever it is, I am glad."

But she was relieved that Teresa confessed no more. Still suffering the first pangs of heartbreak, she feared love for all women. She was not yet far enough away from her own share in it to look at it as related to the pain and pleasure of the world. It affected her, not with bitterness, but with terror, as something compelling, elemental, made to bind the world together. No love, she imagined, could be more exquisite than Llandaff's had been for her; none had died a more tragic death. When she got terrorized at night, she felt the corpse of it rotting at her side. If that could so bloom and so decay, there was no hope for any love. Then the thought of her own answering passion would front her with accusing eyes. It had not waned nor perished. It had been grasping for tyranny over the soul it sought, but it had lived to

regard itself as of no avail. It cried now only for the abasement of self-sacrifice. So she sat in silence, and was afraid for Teresa because she loved a man, — and pitied her and ached for her.

Teresa fell into a blissful drowse, and was only awakened by the carriage coming from the station. She jumped up and ran to the window.

"There they are, all of them," she said, "Miss Neale, Mr. Brownell, and Mr. Warrener. Where's Mr. Brandon? Your husband is helping out — who is it? A stranger! a lady! Oh, what fun!"

Margaret went to the window and looked. The guest was tall, and carried herself well. On the lower step she paused and surveyed the house. She could not distinguish them at the darkened window, but she seemed to be looking Margaret and Teresa full in the face.

"Oh!" said Margaret, "I know. She came to Babine one night. She is Miss Andersen."

Olga mounted the steps, and Teresa went lightly away to her room to dress for dinner.

The newcomer cast a swift glance about for St. John, wanting him there to welcome her, and yet afraid. She pictured his displeasure at her coming, though, meeting Laura by chance, and tempted by an invitation, she had not been able to resist. She was shown upstairs. The others scattered, too, and St. John, also in his room, got no news of the incursion. Brandon, who had preferred to walk from the station, not only to stretch his legs, but because he was afraid of seeing the woman enter, and possibly her meeting with St. John and Teresa both, came into the hall some half hour after the others. Brownell was whis-

ting in the library, turning down the wick of a smoking lamp. Brandon, who meant to speak to nobody about the social thundercloud, in spite of himself found his feet carrying him that way.

"Hullo!" called Brownell, peering into the lamp.
"Hullo!"

"What in thunder did you bring her down here for?" asked Brandon. Brownell looked up with cheerful interest.

"Who?"

"Olga Andersen."

"Oh! — yes. I did n't bring her. Miss Neale did."

Brandon cursed under his breath, and turned about to go.

"What's the row?" said Brownell, coming forward and putting a hand affectionately on his shoulder.
"What is it, old man?"

But Laura was in it, and they could not speak brusquely as man to man. The occasion lay now under the impalpable veil of a woman's caprice. Brandon looked worried.

"Oh, nothing!" he said. "I was surprised, that's all. You've a right to invite anybody to your own house, I should hope. I only felt as my grandfather did about the candidate for governor: 'Yes, yes, good man enough, but how'd you happen to think of him?' Curiosity, that's all! vile curiosity!"

"Miss Neale met her somewhere or other and asked her to come," said Brownell happily. "The more the merrier! She's a very agreeable lady."

"Yes," said Brandon heavily, "she's a very agreeable lady," and he, too, went upstairs.

CHAPTER XXV

A FORGOTTEN CREDITOR

TERESA, a little early for dinner, gazed at herself anxiously in the long glass. She had put on a white gown dating from her commencement day, and freshened with thrifty pains. It looked like a child's dress, with its low corsage and baby sleeves finished by a frilling of lace. She regarded herself with a final scrutiny. It seemed to her, confronting those serious eyes, that she was a very queer little person. But she was a beautiful little person with that beauty which is full of hidden meanings. It may come from some dead forbear, or spring from the haunting influences of birth, or it may belong, by right, to the creature who wears it. But when it is there, no one can dispute it. She had the smooth, low forehead that smiles at grief. Her delicate brows had, like her mouth, some deviation from the ordinary line, an imperfection set upon perfection, to draw the soul perpetually and not to surfeit it. Her eyes were ready to be passionate.

"I am too thin," she thought; but she ignored the girlish neck, where lay delicate hollows, and forgot her arms tapering into exquisite hands. She would have chosen to be a noticeable woman like Margaret, and, thus longing, overlooked her own significance.

So, a little shy in her white frock, a little dissatisfied with what she had to bring to it, she took a yellow daffodil from a vase, and opened her door to go down. St. John was just before her, and, a trifle self-conscious, not knowing whether she looked well or ill, she drew back noiselessly and let him pass. He, not noticing her, was suddenly aware of Olga in the hall below. She was pacing back and forth from library to sitting-room, hoping he would come first and let her placate him. Teresa, a noiseless shadow, lingered, more shy than ever, over the prospect of this gorgeous lady, dressed in sumptuous red. Olga, in one of her rustling turns, caught sight of him for whom she waited. She stopped.

"Tom!" said she eloquently.

St. John paused, too, midway of the flight. Then he continued haltingly. Teresa, seeing the sudden droop of his shoulders, caught her breath. Something was happening. St. John went on, and Olga met him with a pretty little addition of cordiality because she was not wanted. She held out both hands, and before he could respond, laid them on his breast and looked fondly up at him.

"O Tom!" she said entreatingly, "don't be cross. Are you?"

He took her hands, and held one by her side.

"No, Olga," he said gently, "I won't be cross."

It was too keen an emotion for such phrasing. He did not think of her nor of himself. His heart was altogether with the girl upstairs, who loved him, whom he had allowed to love him, and who was not yet touched by pain. With a curious foretaste, he saw in that instant what had been done, and he sick-

ened under it. Olga laughed. Like a child, she was glad enough to be let off.

"I thought you'd be furious," she said, "but I could n't help it. I had to come. I met Miss Neale down town. She invited me, and I posted back with the old lady's cap-ribbons, and told her I'd got to go out of town for a night or two." She slipped her hand through his arm, and led him into the library. "Madam shed tears on the new purple ribbon, but Mrs. Gilroy made me go. *She* was dying for it, bless you! She wants the old lady to learn to live without me."

Teresa had gone back into her room. She had not heard a word beyond that first greeting, but the intimacy of their air and attitude gave her a chill. Now, hearing the others in the hall, she came out, and they all went down together. Brandon at once attached himself to her. He was in high-flying mood, and talked to everybody like a loquacious woman who has determined to make things go.

"Miss Hope," said he, "I'm to sit beside you. I've entreated Brownell. He says I may. I've been meeting these others all day. I had to talk to them on the train, and they've palled upon me. You won't talk. I shan't answer if you do. I'm going to strike for life, liberty, the oyster and the second joint."

Margaret was greeting Olga, and because she had been at Babine that other evening, they forgot to introduce Teresa. So they went in to dinner, and Teresa found herself between Brandon and Willie.

"I thought you were joking," she said to Brandon.

"Not I," said he. "I never joke after I've been

talked at all day. This is bitter earnest. I am going to converse constantly throughout this dinner, and you, being merciful, will not answer me."

St. John was further down the table, but she turned and glanced at him. He was gazing straight before him, and he looked old. He was jaded, harassed. His face had sunken into lines. Teresa forgot everything else, to continue staring at him. She did not know him, this shell of the man, — like him, and yet cruelly unlike. It was neither tender, nor kind, nor loving, as he had been used to look at her. She knew only the self she had called out in him. This was a face that brooded on a hopeless past. Suddenly Brandon leaned forward and shut off her view. It broke the moment for her, and she shrank back into her seat.

"Warrener," Brandon was saying, "how does the 'Householder' thrive? 'How does your garden grow?'"

"The circulation has gone up twenty-five since I was engaged," said Llandaff. "I understand it is now three hundred and thirty-eight."

"I had half a chance to-day to do some dramatic work for the 'Bell,'" said Willie, stretching out his hand, to take a pansy.

"Don't you interfere with the decorations," said Brandon reprovingly. "Let the greens alone."

"Why did n't you accept it?" asked Warrener.

"Because I'm going to sea," said Willie.

"And he's got three hundred dollars in bank," groaned Brandon.

"No, by Jove!" said the poet. "It is n't in the bank; or it is n't in any bank that will do me a

cent's worth of good. That confounded executor won't let me put my claws on it till — Jove, I don't know when."

"Till you've grown up," said Brandon. "Brownell, you've got an excellent *chef*."

"But it wa'n't any joke to get him down here. He had to have his pots and pans imported with him. There was one little copper kind of a saucepan that wa'n't accounted for, and he lost a train to go back for it."

"We can never stand Beb's trays again," said Laura. And Brownell could not resist beaming at her.

"You won't have to. I'll leave him down here. Keep open house. Come when ye like."

To Margaret, who cared very little about the pleasures of the table, French cookery meant French life, and that recalled happiness.

"Is n't it fun, Llandaff?" she said, "the old dishes" —

Llandaff nodded, but Brownell put in, —

"Tell the truth and shame the devil. I hate it myself. Give me a good home supper, — fish hash, hot biscuits and sauce. A cup of tea with it. None o' your coffee afterwards."

"Ah, you have this to please your friends!" said Olga. "You are so kind."

"I have it to please my friends," said Brownell honestly, "but I shall keep that fellow right along. And the reason I keep him is, he's the most expensive thing I can find in the way of a cook. I take more enjoyment now out of getting the most money can buy than I do out of having what I want to eat."



"Feasts of Lucullus!" said Willie, in what he would have called a murmur. "'Roses from Pæstum roseries'!"

"By Jove, Brownell! you're in a bad way," said Brandon concernedly. "If you've got to that stage, you're on the road to worshipping the golden calf. You'd better purchase a small annuity and confide the balance of your spoils to a hole in the ground. You might buy my island for me."

"I don't mind chipping in, if you're in need of an island," said Brownell benevolently. "Like to know what I'm giving to, that's all. What do you want of an island?"

"I intend," said Brandon, "in the later years of a well-spent life, to buy an island and name it Bedlam. A few crazy fellows like me are coming to live under my benign sway. We shall have cakes and ale, and bees in the orchard" —

"Likewise your bonnets," interpolated Laura.

"'And murmuring of innumerable bees'!" quoted Willie.

"I shall live in a grove and carry on the business of oracle," said Brandon. "There will be a stone wall about the grove, and a hedge seven feet high, with a ditch four feet six. That's where your money will come in. At enormous expense, you will have the hedge to set out when it's of the requisite height, and I shan't have to wait for it to grow."

"What kind of questions shall you answer?" asked Margaret.

"Any old kind, — anything that relates to the conduct of life. Warrener knows. He does Notes and Queries. I don't care for the grove myself. I'd

rather walk about magnificently, dispensing favors. But you have to concede something to the oracular idea. I shall have a grove."

"There 'll be tourists," said Laura, "sight-seers, Chautauquans, Cooks."

"Will there? No, madam, there will not. It's going to be an island. The water is to be mined, and every boat that comes within one mile of our shore will be incontinently blown up. Therein will lie one of my amusements. I shall have a little outlook built in the grove, and there I shall sit, watching my fellow-beings, like the sparks, fly upward."

"But where 'll you get your supplies?" asked Willie. "Your own boats will be blown up."

"Oh, Brownell will see to that! He holds the purse."

Brownell had risen. He lifted his wine-glass, and coughed, preparatory to proposing a toast.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "this is an occasion on which — a very pleasant occasion indeed. It is especially pleasant because I am told by Miss Neale we have among us an engaged couple whose health I am about to propose. I mean Miss" —

To the amazement of everybody, Brandon, too, leaped up and began to sing, —

" 'What shall he have who killed the deer? ' "

Even in the easy-mannered Republic there were social decencies, and no one joined him. St. John was looking straight before him, his lips set tight. Teresa sat perfectly still. Things had taken on a dreamlike aspect. The others were conscious that something was about to happen. Brandon sang his catch noisily, and thought while he sang it. He

was quite willing to make an ass of himself, to knock over the glasses, and in general play the brute. But he knew perfectly well that the moment his voice died, Brownell would take up his speech where he left it. And it happened.

"I propose," said the host, "Mr. St. John and Miss Andersen, the happy pair. Long may they live!"

They drank ceremoniously, the Warreners not with much interest in Olga, and wondering why she was there at all: Teresa, setting her lips to her glass, and not wetting them. Brandon could not look at her. He knew she put the glass down and stood there, a still little figure, in the pause while the others drank. Brownell turned benignly to St. John.

"Come, sir," said he, "speech! I think that's what we should all say: Speech!"

It was Margaret who first saw how ghastly St. John looked. He was standing there gripping his wine-glass as it stood on the table. It was a second only, but that seemed interminably long. He was only conscious of being baited, though with the utmost innocence on the part of his tormentor. There was no room in his sensations for either of the women whose line of life seemed to cross so fatally in him. He was merely the victim of an intense discomfort.

"Oh, excuse him," said Margaret. "A speech? It's cruelty. Excuse him, or I'll recite something." She sat down, and looked imperatively at Brownell.

"Pardon me," said St. John, and also seated himself.

"If I had the art of making after-dinner speeches," put in Brandon, "there would be no quelling me."

Doors would be locked to keep me out. Banquets would be planned in secret lest I should get word of them, and I should break through doors and windows and appear breathless, covered with lath and plaster, gasping, 'Let me speak!'

Still the little figure was quite silent at his side, and Brandon prayed to what gods he had to make their sitting short. Margaret felt the discomfort of the atmosphere, and hardly knowing why she did it, gave a little imperative signal to Laura at the head of the table. Laura, surprised in her turn, made the movement, and they rose. Brandon sighed with relief. He could not look at Teresa. He shrank from the pain her eyes would show. Then he knew, in the pause of their grouping themselves to finish a talk before leaving the room, that she slipped out noiselessly and ran up the stairs.

"I want to speak to you," he said to Margaret. She followed him to the window at the end of the hall, and he pushed aside the curtain, as if to look out on the night.

"Go upstairs to Teresa," he said. "Don't leave her."

It was the first time he had used the Child's name. In her trouble, she seemed very near to him.

"What is it?" asked Margaret, in the act of turning.

He laid his hand on hers and held it. There were tears in his eyes.

"I don't know — exactly," he said, "some deviltry. St. John is connected, in a way, with that Andersen woman. Teresa never knew it. Go and stay with her. Don't leave her."

Margaret hurried up the stairs, and Brandon got his hat and coat and went outdoors — to smoke, he said. He paced up and down by himself, and when Brownell summoned him, concerned to find him there, he refused to come. He wanted air.

Margaret knocked at Teresa's door, and heard no answer. She opened it and went in. Brandon had been so peremptory that she dared not do otherwise. The room was dark, with a leaping of firelight on the wall.

"Teresa," she called, "where are you?"

Her voice throbbed with apprehension, but the girl's in answer was quite calm.

"Here," she said. "What is it?"

She got up from the bed, where Margaret had not distinguished her from the other whiteness, and came forward.

Margaret took her hands. They were cold as ice. She held them close, not knowing what to say.

"I was afraid," she began, "I was afraid you were tired or ill." She tried to draw her nearer, but Teresa resisted her.

"No," said the Child, in the same passionless voice, "I am not tired."

Margaret tried again.

"You want to be alone, and I won't let you," she said, leading her to the fire. "I can't leave you quite yet. I want to get you warm."

Teresa let her throw another stick on the fire, and herself drew forward a chair. She sat down without waiting for Margaret, as if she found it impossible to stand. Margaret, too, placed a chair, and they sat there a moment in silence. Then Margaret got

up and knelt by the girl's side. She put her arms about the slender form, and held them there.

"Don't be hard to me," she said. "Don't push me away. Something is the matter. You need n't tell me. I won't talk to you. Only let me stay here. You must n't be alone." It was the simplest of human comforting, but it came from an anguish of sympathy such as they know who are not yet healed themselves. In that moment Margaret understood why she herself had suffered. She was a part now of the great brotherhood of pain. She was hurt through the hurt of the world, and she could send messages. To Teresa, her voice came vaguely as if she were very far away. Margaret's nearness did not trouble her. It seemed very kind and soothing, but it hardly meant anything at all. She did not want any presence but that of the man with whom her nerves had begun to thrill in unison; and he was reft away from her by something not understood.

"You are very kind," she said vaguely.

Margaret still sat there. Teresa forgot her in trying to think back over the immediate past, so near that only last night it had seemed the warmest thing in life. It was as remote now as a story told her long ago, by lips echoing out of a dream. They sat there for a long time, and suddenly it came over Teresa, with a great revulsion, that she must be alone. She had to run,—to escape, stung by the gadfly grief. She moved hastily, and Margaret withdrew her arms.

"I must go to bed," said the girl. "Please let me be."

Margaret came to her feet, and Teresa drew a long

breath, and then shut her teeth lest she should sob. She, too, rose.

"You are sure you 'd rather?"

"Yes."

Margaret turned away, and Teresa made a quick step after her.

"I will be good," she said, like a child. "I will go to bed and keep still. I will be good."

Such thoughts of death and madness were in her heart that she made no doubt Margaret knew what she meant, and that there was need of promising to be good. It was true. The other woman did know. She felt at that moment the impotence of those who have suffered and learned that for the keenest pang the gods have medicine. Yet the cup cannot always be shared at once. The tortured soul also must crush its bitter herb and make the potion for itself.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CUP OF LIFE

WHEN Margaret had gone, Teresa closed the door upon her in relief. She wanted nothing now but to be alone. It seemed like the beginning of a long withdrawal; she was shut out from life by the calamity of life. She slipped off her dress, and put a log on the fire, almost afraid, without that friendly leaping of the flame. She went about quietly, making herself ready, and then got into bed and lay there with folded hands. Obedience constrained her, the obedience of a soldier or a child. Her mind was very clear, and she ran back over these last days and reviewed them, to her own shame. From the first, she saw now, with a just weighing of her accountability, she had taken his love for granted. His kindness she had accepted as the one thing transcending kindness. He had sought her out in the beginning, to be good to her; he offered friendliness, and she called it love. The moment was only a few days old when she had so innocently put up her mouth to be kissed. It was because all her kisses were for him, as all her love and she herself were for him. He had answered her because he was gentle and because he was a man. Suddenly there came into her untaught life some understanding of the different nature of the man and woman,

that cruel difference each must learn at first hand, and always at some cost. Through the days they had been together here, not once, save as she asked him, had he said he loved her. She had told him; over and over she had told him, and had been glad to do it. There was no gift rich enough to bring him. And all that time he had not wanted it, with a perfect will. She had only made him traitorous to some one else.

Lying there quite still, she heard the voices from the room below. Willie sang, and the rest smothered him in a laughing chorus. They came upstairs something before midnight, and after a time, she heard Margaret, as she thought, creep to the sill to listen. The door was locked. She felt safe, but safer when the steps went away again. Then gradually the whole house fell into quiet, and she lay with her hands still folded. The fire smouldered. The moon rose and cast fine traceries on the wall. The simple setting of the scene was like another call to agony, because, the night before, her eyes had dwelt upon the same picture as it framed her joy. Suddenly the madness of grief came upon her, that strange tightening of the nerves and fever in the brain. She slipped out of bed, and dressed noiselessly, to her hat and jacket. Then she stole downstairs, and through the hall, where the only light was from the great fan above the door, and was out in the cool spring air. That was a relief. She breathed the air sobbingly, and looked up into the sky. Presently she set out walking down the drive.

Brandon, sitting at his window, saw her, and at once guessed who it was, and why she had gone. He knew that deadly terror of the soul which leads it to

flee from its tormentor, life. He knew it must be unhindered until it realizes its loneliness and turns distraught with another kind of terror. So he ran down the stairs, took his hat and coat from the hall, and followed her. For a long time he lurked in the shadow, lest she should turn about before she needed him. Teresa kept on down the drive and into the left-hand road, leading through the woodland where she had walked that afternoon. She went steadily on, and Brandon was behind her, treading as softly as he could. They passed into the darkness of the trees, and here Teresa hurried, and Brandon, afraid of being too near, sometimes lost sight of her altogether. This was a half-mile stretch of woods, and coming again into the light where the trees ceased, he turned a corner, and came upon her, sitting by the roadside on a stone.

She was suddenly very tired. Her mind had led her forth to breathe, and work off some of this raging fever; but now it would not act. She sat there forlorn and cold. He began a cheerful whistle, and then called to her.

"It's Brandon. Don't be scared."

He walked up to her with assurance, and sat down by her side.

"Jove!" he said affably, "you've got the nerve, sitting on cold stones in February!"

"I am not cold," said Teresa, but her teeth were chattering. "It is n't cold." She was not surprised at seeing him. The only thing that could have moved her would have been to see St. John. He was infinitely far away. Brandon folded the coat he had been carrying.

"Get up a minute," he said. "Sit on this."

She rose obediently, and sat down when he told her.

"Don't wait for me," she said, "you will be cold, too."

"I am only going to stay a bit till you get rested. Then I shall take you home."

At that she shook visibly.

"I can't go back," she cried. "I can't go into that house again." She said it defiantly, expecting him to combat her. But he soothed her instead.

"No, you sha'n't go back there. Do you want me to take you somewhere — I don't know where — and get the earliest train to town?"

For a moment, the thought of her own little room was friendly to her. Then she remembered that St. John would come to Babine.

"No!" she said, "I can't go there."

"Well, we must think up something else. But I can't have you getting cold. Take a nip of this." He gave her his flask.

"I don't want it. This is n't because I'm cold."

"It has the same effect. Take it. A swallow! now another! Yes, you can. Oh, come on!"

The liquid strangled her, and she coughed herself into a glow.

"Look at that moon," said Brandon, putting the flask away. "Insolent old jade! She's too effulgent for me. Something more retiring suits my disposition." She did not look. "Drat her 'bragian boldness'! What business has she got putting out the stars, and setting up a monopoly in the heavens? Confounded old egotist! I hate the whole business."

"Mr. Brandon," said Teresa, "if I do anything queer, will you stand by me?"

"Oh, yes! that's what I'm for."

"I mean, don't let other people come near me. I may do things — I may say things — I don't think I am quite in my right mind."

"You're a little boozy, that's all," said Brandon easily. "You've had two swallows of brandy."

"I don't know yet where I can go; but I shall be able to think about that. Now I am not myself. I am not in my right mind."

There was no way of defending her from self-betrayal, and he was not sure of wishing it. He sat down by her, and took her hand. It was bare, and the fingers chilled him.

"See here, dear," he said; "you're in a hole. You ache like the dickens. But it won't last."

"Oh, yes!" she said, "it will last. I did it myself. Nobody is to blame. I spoiled my own life."

"No," said Brandon, speaking slowly, and bringing all his will to bear upon her, "it won't last. And you mustn't waste any more time on it than you can help. Listen! you're young. You've got a voice. Oh, yes, you have! That's all rot about a little healthy thing like you not having lots of chances. You've been hysterical about it. You keep yourself well. You get strong. You'll sing yet. And what if you don't? Good God, Child! don't waste your life because you've guessed wrong and backed losers. Where's your courage?"

"I have n't any courage," said Teresa quietly. "You don't know what I have done."

"I don't want to know what you've done. I know

in the main. You've got your first breath of the great instincts that almost invariably betray us. God gave them to every one of us, but he gave them without directions in six languages on every bottle. You've taken an overdose, — or the wrong dose — I don't know which. Swallow your antidote and fight it out."

"I don't want to fight it out. I want to die."

"That's cheap talk. It won't help you. Die! If we died every time we had a pain, there wouldn't be so much hysteria."

"Don't scold me," said Teresa.

"Scold you! Yes, I will. You poor little ignorant beggar, you don't know any more about life than I do about paradise, and they've thrust the whole business on you without warning. Come, Child! I've lived twice as long as you have. I've learned how it's done. You trust me. You do as I tell you."

"But you are not happy."

"Happy! Nobody is happy. Happiness is nothing but a handful of oats the Almighty keeps shaking in a peck measure, to lure us on. You are expected to do certain things. You are intended to keep the world in motion. And you've got to go it blind. You won't get any satisfaction out of prayers for mercy on your individual case. You just shut your teeth now, and say you'll tough it out."

She sat motionless, and Brandon had a discomfiting sense of having talked unheeded. Then, by the grace of God, he sneezed, and Teresa instantly got up.

"You are cold," said she. "I'll go."

Brandon threw the coat over his arm, and took her hand. They walked rather slowly, for he guessed how tired she was.

"I wish you'd listen," he urged. "I've got a lot to say. You never knew I was cut out for the pulpit?"

"You can say what you like."

"You mean you won't listen. I'll bet you won't. Dear, get your fighting blood up. If anything hurts you, tear it out. You won't bleed to death. You think you will, but you won't."

"I don't want to tear it out."

"No, not you! Real woman, are n't you? Sit and stroke the fox while he gnaws you. O Lord! Lord! I wish anybody would ever learn from anybody else. Here I am, stuck all over with prescriptions, like a quack medicine vender, and you won't take 'em. I know how to live, I tell you. Why won't you go by me?"

"You know how to live?" said Teresa sharply.

"Well, have you followed your own advice?"

"No, you little fierce thing! I was too old. You're caught young."

"Do you wish you had followed it?"

Brandon stopped. He dropped her hand, and took off his hat to the night breeze.

"No," he said. "If I had reconciled myself to life, I should be a damned Philistine going out to dinners and writing conventional rot. I followed my nature. If I had n't, I should be weaker and more miserable than I am now."

They went on in silence, through the woods and up to the great gate. There Teresa stopped as if her feet were held, in spite of her. A flagging will no longer served her. She spoke appealingly.

"I can't go in. I want to behave, — I don't want to make you trouble; but I can't go in."

The light was still burning in the little lodge. Brandon, perplexed beyond reasoning, caught at intuition and followed it.

"Will you do exactly as I tell you?" he asked.

"If you don't tell me to go back there."

"Then come."

He led her up to the lodge and tapped at the door. Immediately it opened, and Mother Sanders herself stood there in her little cap, her short-gown and petticoat.

"You've a right to be asleep at this time of night," she said, but peering forward, she saw Teresa's face and held the door wide. "Come," she cried, "come, *mavourneen*." Teresa staggered when she reached the warmth of the little room, and Brandon upheld her. He carried her to the big chair beside the hearth, and placed her in it. The old woman brought a cricket, and lifted the Child's feet to it, as Brandon drew the chair nearer the fire.

"Margot's in bed, praise God!" said Mother Sanders.

Teresa took off her hat, and then shut her eyes and leaned back against the chair. She was deadly pale. Her face, in spite of its youth, had sunken into hollows. She was an image of grief. The old woman looked at her and then at Brandon, with an accusing query. Brandon was taking off his coat. He nodded at her and smiled, and muttering something, she smiled back.

"Well," said he, "what are you up for at this time of night?"

"I takes a cup of tea when I can't sleep," said she. "It strengthens me."

"Well, *we* take a walk. But we don't mind a cup of tea."

She went off into the sitting-room for her best cups, and he followed her. In there, he laid a hand upon her arm and turned her about, to face him.

"Never mind your cups, mother," said he. "You look here. That girl is worn out. You saw grief ahead of her. It has come. You must n't ask her about it. She won't tell you. She won't tell me. But she can't go near those people at the house. Have n't you got a little bed, to put her into? Can't you keep her, and not let them know she's here? I'll get the rest of them back to town, and then she can see what she wants to do."

"I've got a bed for her," said the old woman. "Bless God! You go now, dear. You leave the child with me." She looked up at him from her withered state, and he thought how the beauty of age, if it be clean and sweet, transcends even the beauty of youth.

"God bless you, mother," he said. "I shall be a good Catholic yet."

"It's all one," said the old woman, "all one." She gave him a pat on the arm, and turned back to her china. Brandon went out into the kitchen, and bent over the Child. She was breathing regularly, and seemed to be asleep. But as he looked at her, she opened her eyes and met his. She smiled faintly, to please him.

"Teresa," he said, "I am going to leave you here. Granny will give you a room and a bed. Nobody is coming near you. I shall tell the others you have gone back to town. When I get there, I shall tell

some other lie. Then I'll come down and see you, and we will decide what you want to do next."

She smiled again at him. "Will you do it?" he asked. "Does it suit you?"

"Yes!" Brandon took his hat and coat and went out at the door just as Mother Sanders appeared with a fine white and gilt cup, and poured Teresa's tea. The girl had shut her eyes again, and the old woman potted about, and presently brought the cup and put it to her lips. Teresa looked up at her, and found the worn face beautiful. It held all the meaning of a life nearly done. It meant passions past, and hot blood cooled. It was benignant, compassionate, too wise to question, too simple to desire. It was the face of one who had known elemental life as it is in human beings, and accepted it as God-given, without questioning. Therein old age and childhood met. Teresa remembered the prophecy, and that seemed to make kinship between them. "Grief!" she said, and again as she looked into the old face, "Grief!" The woman put one hard hand gently upon her cheek and compelled it to the cup. And while Teresa drank, her hostess murmured something to her in an unknown tongue.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE END OF PLEASURING

EARLY that morning, Brandon sent a note to Margaret's room, begging her to see him before the others should be stirring. She obeyed at once, and went down to the library, while the rest were still in bed.

"What is it?" she asked, coming hastily in where he sat before the fire, his feet stretched out to the blaze. He laid down the book he was reading, a *Marcus Aurelius* which seemed irritatingly inapplicable to New England and the shock of modern conflict. He gave her a chair, and spoke rapidly.

"You mustn't tell this, please. Teresa Hope has gone to pieces. She won't stay here. She won't go home. I've left her at the lodge with that unearthly old woman."

"Shall I go to her?" asked Margaret.

"I don't know. Yes, I guess so. But what I want you to do is to pack her clothes, and let me take them to her. We must go home to-day. We must. Break up this tomfoolery. Mrs. Warrener, there's been enough of it."

"I am not to tell?"

"You are not to tell: not your husband, not anybody. The Child has had her first dose of life. She must get over it in her own way. But especially she must not see St. John."

"Why not?" Margaret was interrogating him with clear, almost accusing eyes.

"Why? Oh, I can't tell you! I don't half guess. He's a poor meagre devil. He does n't know his own mind. Nobody does, or ever has. He has n't any mind to know. He'll marry that woman up there, Olga Andersen, or the first one that gets her hands on him. But the Child shan't be mixed up in any kind of an emotional scrimmage."

"But I'm afraid she cares about him."

"Who?"

"Teresa."

"So much the worse. The harder for her to break it off."

"But she cares, Mr. Brandon. She cares. What right have we to interfere?"

"Cares! What does caring mean, at her age and innocence? A well tended mustache, a manner of worldly ease! He has juggled with her imagination. She thinks he's the fairy prince, and he's nothing but a decently born, well-bred, very dull and rather wobbly person."

Margaret looked obstinate. All her old ecstatic dreams came flooding back. The relation between man and woman lay, to her, among the remote and secret issues of life. Love was love.

"Besides," said Brandon irritably, "the girl does n't wish to see him. She wants to be alone, absolutely alone, to think it over. You can't do her a worse turn than to betray her to St. John."

"Very well. That alters it. But let me run down to the lodge now, before breakfast. I must know how she is."

They went out together into a frosty morning. Margaret walked fast, paying little attention to him. This, in her guesswork from what he had said, seemed a strange repetition of her own night of pain when she discovered that she, too, had lost her dream. She began to see how the cup is lifted to one mouth after another, and, longing to carry help, she knew no help was in her.

Margot, seeing them coming, opened the door of the little house, and stood awaiting them. She looked like some giant goddess, calm as the morning. Brandon thought, as he approached her, that she had gained her serenity through lack of sex. In spite of that tremendous frame fit for love and motherhood, she was an undeveloped creature, as strong as a tree and as unmoved. She had no hunger not to be assuaged by homely living.

The kitchen fire was burning hard, and the little old woman sat beside it, her pipe between her lips. At sight of them, she tapped the bowl carefully, and laid it aside, nodding at Brandon.

"The little girl slept a bit between four and six," she said. "Go in that way. She won't want to see you, but it's best for her. Ay, it's best."

Brandon sat down by the fire, and Margaret stepped softly through to the bedroom. The old woman pointed out the way and let her go alone. Teresa was in bed, in the clean little room, her head on a linen pillow, the red and white quilt drawn to her chin. They had taken down her hair, and the two braids lay at either side of her pale cheeks. She seemed to have suffered the wasting of illness. Her eyes met Margaret's solemnly, and did not turn

aside. She had gone too far on a lonesome road to shrink from questioning. Margaret took the chair by the bed, and put her lips to the little hand that crept outside the quilt.

"Have you had breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes." Margaret could think of nothing else to say. Teresa let her eyes wander back to her, and added, "You must n't worry about me."

Two tears fell from Margaret's eyes and splashed the childish hand. She felt quite powerless.

"I can't help worrying," she said simply.

"I suppose I'm doing something very foolish," said Teresa, "but I can't do anything else. I can't see people. I want to stay here a few days. Mother Sanders will let me. She says so. Don't tell any one. Let me alone." It was immediately clear to Margaret that Brandon was right.

"I won't tell anybody," she promised. "But you mean it? Not anybody? Not if you are asked about? Not if somebody worries about you?"

Teresa's forehead contracted into fine lines of pain.

"Not anybody," she repeated, "not anybody."

Margaret kissed her hand again, and rose to go.

"I'll send down your clothes," she said. "Mr. Brandon will bring them. He is in the other room. Should you like to see him?"

"No," answered Teresa, "not anybody. Give him my love."

When Margaret went into the kitchen, she found him deep in talk with the old woman, Margot standing solemnly by. It was plain that to the gigantic daughter, her mother was a perfect personage, full of wisdom and days, in whose presence lay safety.

"You keep her here as long as you can," said Brandon. "Let her lie in that bed, and go to walk. Tell her about Ireland, and the Little People, and herbs, and grass, and things that grow in the woods, and get some red into her cheeks. You know, mother."

"Ay," said she, looking at him kindly, "I know."

"And if she gets discontented, or wants to go away, or anything's the matter, you let Margot here just run to the station and telegraph me this." He scribbled on a sheet of paper from his notebook and gave it to Margot. It read, "The wind is in the east."

"I shall do that," said Mother Sanders decisively, — "I shall do that."

"Good-by, mother," said Brandon. He shook hands with them both, and they looked at him kindly. They had no eyes for Margaret. She waited quite humbly in the background. But when there was a chance, she, too, shook hands with them, and took her leave.

"What makes people like you so?" she asked, when they were outside.

"God knows," said Brandon indifferently. "It's a sort of thing that profits neither them nor me."

"It is a gift. I wish to Heaven I had it, — for my profession. I'm too cold; I'm too self-contained. If I were like you, I could get there."

"Don't you worry," said Brandon. "You've got something else. This kitchen-fire business is all very well, but you've got something better. Great passions, great agonies — they're all in your handbag, ready for use."

Neither of them spoke of Teresa, because she appealed to them too keenly. But suddenly Margaret said, when they were almost at the door, —

“ We can’t let that child suffer so.”

“ We ’ve got to.”

“ We need n’t. Sometimes I think we should n’t yield to suffering. We act as if this were a fever that had got to run its course.”

“ It is. The temperature won’t go down for a long time. She may be sick a year, two years, five. It’s a damnable malady.”

Margaret stopped and looked at him in quick revolt.

“ I believe in love,” she said. “ I believe in love.”

“ So do I,” said Brandon sadly, “ something that we have agreed to call by that name. But it is variously defined.”

“ If that man in there loves this girl,” said Margaret, “ he must give up the other woman, like a man, and marry her.”

“ Oh, no, he must n’t! The other woman has contented him for a good long course of years. Besides, the other woman won’t let him. If St. John wants this child, let him work for her. He’s never worked for anything in his life yet.”

The murmur of voices came from the dining-room.

“ What are you going to do,” asked Margaret, “ when they ask for Teresa ? ”

“ Lie.”

“ More Maying ? ” inquired Laura, as they went in and took their places, bringing the air of the morning with them.

“ More Maying,” said Brandon calmly. “ I’ve been up for hours. First I formed an affable partnership with Miss Hope, then Mrs. Warrener.”

St. John looked up eagerly. There was a vacant place at his side.

"You're lucky in Corinnas," said Laura.

"Miss Hope sends her regrets and excuses," said Brandon to Brownell, beginning an egg with delicate care. "She had a summons from town, a special delivery, I think, and went up on the early train."

"So!" said Brownell in concern. "Special delivery. When? Last night?"

"Don't know," said Brandon, absorbed in his egg; "might not have been a letter, might have been a wire. Don't know anything about it except that she went. I helped her off. Carried her bag."

"You did n't drive?" asked Brownell. "You walked to the station?"

"Yes."

"Come now, I don't like that!"

"Oh, we liked it. I'm a devil of a fellow in the country. I touch the earth, and presto! I can carry bags, and walk before breakfast, and eat four eggs at a sitting." He took his second one with appreciation.

"I shall have to go up to-day, too," said Margaret. "They want me for rehearsal."

"Oh, by George!" cried Brownell boyishly.

"You could come down again to-night," said Llandaff, knowing Laura wanted to stay.

"No," said Margaret, "I can't. It has all been very delightful, Mr. Brownell, but I must go."

Olga was looking from one to the other, in child-like dismay. Her good time was ending soon. It had only lasted over night, and she wanted a whole day, with perhaps a drive and a long talk with St. John. As for him, his breath quickened, and his heart rose in spite of himself. Escaped from Olga and back in town, anything might happen. But Laura, for the

instant, would have none of it. With Margaret or without, she meant to stay, and it was Brownell himself who reversed her decision.

"Oh, come now," said he, "just a few nights more! Finish the week. I'll tell you what I planned. I want to have my little girl here over Sunday. I've sent for her. I want you to see her. Claribel! my little girl!" He was looking imploringly at Laura, with an appeal which was at once farcical to them all. They knew what he wanted. Llandaff knew, and had jealous sickness, though with no fears. The millionaire would go a-courting, and Laura was to be introduced to her stepdaughter. Laura, too, read the prospect, and took alarm. She was not afraid of the ridicule of her clan. It imported little. But she was aghast at boredom. No Claribel for her until she had decided what to do with Claribel's father. She looked at him in a gracious sympathy.

"I am so sorry," she said, "but I am afraid it must come to an end. Mrs. Warrenner tears us all away."

"The poet here, you know," said Brandon, eating prodigious quantities, and despising himself inwardly for his carnal enjoyment of rich men's tables, "the poet can stay. Not in the house, Brownell! no! no! shut it up. Let no marauding versifiers infest it. But in the woods, down below here, near to nature's heart. He will build him a lodge, he will spear salmon in the rushing torrent" —

"Salmon!" cried Brownell. "No, no, Brandon, not salmon!"

"Salmon," said Brandon decisively. "I repeat it. You may think there are no salmon in Matlock, but to the poet it's all one. Emerson says if you love

nature sufficiently, the tiger won't eat you. I insist upon an equal latitude for the poet. He shall spear salmon wherever he prefers. He shall confront the tiger in his lair, he shall climb to the eagle's eyrie, and pluck a feather from his tail " —

" Oh, come, Brandon," said Willie, " you don't know any more about eagles and tigers and lairs than I do ! "

" No, my son, I do not. And I thank God my feet were led in macadamized ways, and my food set before me in dishes."

The breakfast was hastened a little because there was packing to do. They went off in a scurry, and Brownell, in the last carriage with the cook and his saucepans, felt low in his mind. He had given pleasure, but his own part of the junket had failed. Laura was to see Claribel, and she had not seen her. As they drove past the lodge, Margot was there to wave to them, as she had been at their coming, though she looked a little graver now. They waved back at her, but Brandon put out his head and smiled at the old woman, who, as he expected, was at the kitchen pane.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN TOWN AGAIN

ARRIVED in town, St. John put Olga into a carriage. He hesitated a moment, while she looked at him with large-eyed expectation. Then from a savage patience and his old obedience to what was demanded of him, he got in after her. There were deep lines between his eyes, and the eyes themselves lacked lustre. Olga was sorry for him : a little curious, too, but chiefly sorry. She put her hand on his, and held it warmly.

"Tom," she said, "what is it?"

"I don't know, Olga," he answered quietly. "I don't know." And it seemed to him that, beyond a sense of general perplexity, he did not know. Life was an untidy web. He might have brought about the entanglement for himself, or it might have been tangled for him. It was there, and his feet were caught by it. At the moment, he liked her sympathy, little as he liked her. It was warm and human. Presently he awoke to some sense that she might be dreading her dull service.

"Are n't you about tired of your old lady?" he asked.

"Tired to death."

"Give it up."

"I've got to do something," said Olga, not quite speciously, but yet with a childlike desire to let him see how wrong her life was going. She was nothing but a child, an elemental creature, not with great passions, but the simplest instincts toward her kind. It had begun to dawn on her lately that perhaps Tom would have liked her better if she had had more reserves toward him, if she had, as her poor little mind put it, taken a stand. She had been quite obedient, first to Jim, who was the stronger spirit, then to St. John. She had taken his money, and waited on his pleasure. He had not sued for her to marry him, but thrown her a careless promise when promises had become farcical. She had begun to learn that perhaps the women whom men marry willingly do not make themselves too cheap. On the heels of her thought came St. John's question, an old interrogation and one she had always heard with equanimity and a thrill of pleasure like a child promised a present.

"Are you all right for money?"

But this time, she made her foolish little subterfuge. "I don't believe I can take any more money, Tom."

"Why?"

He was looking at her, at last, in frank astonishment. She had no reason to give, no beguiling reason, and she was not clever enough to invent one. So she only said again, —

"I don't believe I can."

"Nonsense!" said he, "nonsense, old girl! After all you and I have been through together? Nonsense." The tone of kindness broke through her reserve, and she burst forth, —

"O Tom, let's get away from here. You're wor-

ried and so am I. Let's get back to Germany — or France. I'd rather try France this time. Let's have some life."

He was hardly hearing her. His mind had flown back to the house where Teresa must be, and he was all impatience to get there, and find out what had happened and why she had run away. He had no purpose toward her. He only felt that he must be with her to save her from something, and it was quite remorselessly clear in his mind that the something might be himself. So he only half heard Olga, and answered her absently : —

"I don't know, Olga, I don't know."

Then the carriage stopped, he helped her out and went up the steps. She looked at him imploringly, as they stood there waiting.

"When shall I see you again, Tom?" she asked.

"Soon, very soon," he answered, with the firmness he could always muster for details. "I'll come."

The door was opened, and they said a formal good-by. He ran down the steps, and told the man to drive to Merrymount Street. Impatience had him by the throat. He was in a fever. At last he was ready not to be a coward, but there was no path to honor save through mortal hurt to somebody, and he knew it was impossible that the victim should be Teresa. He did not put his passion for her into considered words. It hardly belonged to the ordinary ways of life. But whether he loved her or not, he knew he could not let her suffer. At Babine, he ran upstairs to Margaret's door. She was poring over a book of costumes, searching for the period of her "Banished Queen." Her dresses had to be made,

and at the expenditure of some energy, she meant to have them cheaply done. When she saw him, her face changed. Hard as she thought Brandon had been on him, she had yet been influenced by Brandon.

"Mrs. Warrener," said St. John hurriedly, "is Miss Hope here?"

"Here?"

"I mean in the house. She came up to town."

Margaret did not answer. She closed her book, and laid it on the table.

"Teresa is not here, Mr. St. John," she said slowly. "She won't be here for the present."

"But where is she?"

"I promised not to tell."

"You promised not to tell! Why?"

"I can't tell you that, even."

St. John looked at her, amazed. Then his face suffused. He understood. The girl had wished to escape.

"What has happened to her?" he asked imploringly.

Margaret lost patience. She knew at once too much and too little, — too much from Brandon's standpoint, too little from St. John's.

"You are the last person to ask what has happened to her," she said. "Let her alone. That is the only service you can do her."

Let her alone! He had thought himself her champion, so near her that all these people seemed like aliens to them both. Suddenly, like the changes in a dream, it was he who was the alien and they who must defend her. Margaret had always been the essence of true gentleness. If she was ruthless to

him, it must mean that he deserved scathing. He turned to go, but at the door looked back at her. "Mrs. Warrener," he said, "whatever has happened to her, she would want me to know. You don't understand" — There he stopped.

"I don't understand at all," said Margaret, more gently, "but it is true, Mr. St. John. She does n't want you to know." The tone arrested him.

"Did she tell you that?" he asked.

"Yes."

He made her a ceremonious bow in a recurrence to his old-fashioned way, as if the occasion had suddenly become dignified and elect. Then he went off to his own rooms. He sat down and smoked and thought, but always of Teresa. It was not the eager lover who must see her and petition for his happiness. He wanted only to assure himself of hers. He had touched the Child's life with his uncertain finger, and had somehow hurt her. He sat there and ached with sorrow for her.

Margaret could not work that morning. The little drama had maimed her, too. She saw Teresa's pale face, the wounded eyes. The grief of the world hung over her like a cloud, and called her to look upon it. Not long ago she had felt that she herself had been singled out by some headstrong fate. Now she realized that pain was everywhere. Once the great tragedies had loomed before her like mountain peaks; but there were always valleys below, full of cooling green. To-day she saw that these peaks are the sorrows of the souls who have, for some reason, great light upon them, to betray them to the eye. They are not alone. Everywhere pain is beating on. Uncounted souls suf-

fer and make no sign. The hunger of Héloïse, the longing of Tristan, the tragedy of Paolo and Francesca dying in the springtime, — these are but legible pages in the book of life. But there are countless pages besides, that no hand has turned. The bird falls in the forest with a wound in his breast. No one knows about the bird. The spent runner drops at his task, and no one cares, save that the message never came. It is everywhere, the universal pang.

It had made her strangely impersonal. She expected nothing now out of life except the chance for good fighting. The drama that had touched her nearest was going on under her eyes. She saw it, though her eyes were hidden. Llandaff had done with her. She recognized it without a pang. His blood had turned to some one else. That only gave her a curious ache of sympathy, because it was apparent to her that Laura did not love him. Laura could love no one. As for her own poor part, she seemed to be standing by him in some trial he had brought upon himself, to keep him, so far as it might be, true to his bond until she could release him from it. And as yet it seemed better to stay by him than to set him free. In those few weeks of suffering with him in his physical overthrow, she had learned what many women are years in compassing: the meagreness of the joys of love, the poverty of earthly bonds without the spirit. He had turned away from her. That hurt her now chiefly because he needed care and comforting. She scorned the desires that had hitherto fed her life, and though she tried still to build up something new, it was not for her own enriching, but only that she might be by when he was in need. If he could come to her for

simple human service, for that she would barter all the passionate converse of old love.

Day by day she watched him, her heart weighed down by fear. He was no better. The springs of life were low in him, body and mind, and though he set his fingers doggedly to work, it was a mechanical tasking. The weeks at St. Hilda's had been the beginning, not the end.

The day after their return from Matlock, Doctor Milbanke came. He found Margaret alone, and eager to see him.

"Where's Llandaff?" he asked.

"Upstairs, sketching."

"How is he?"

"Not well at all, doctor. He won't eat. I'm afraid he does n't sleep."

"He ought to go away. Won't you take a trip, you two?"

"No, doctor, not we two. I've got to be here, you know. I'm under contract to the Minervas. Besides, if I'm to get an engagement in the fall, I can't go kiting off this spring." She could have added: "He would not go with me."

The doctor hesitated.

"What should you say, Margaret?" he asked, watching her keenly, "if I persuaded Llandaff to take a little trip with me? to France, perhaps, to Italy, Algiers, Egypt? What should you say?"

Her face flushed radiantly. For an instant the woman rose in her, and felt a thrill of triumph. He was to be taken away, not only from her, but from Laura.

"I should love you forever!" she cried.

"I've been thinking of it for some weeks. You and Olivia could take care of each other. I'd look out for Llandaff. He'd amuse me." That was a pious lie. Warrener was at present a dull and an exasperating companion, surly, uncommunicative, wrapt in himself. It was a labor of weary love the doctor was undertaking, and chiefly for Margaret's sake. "I'll ask him by and by," he said. "We'll see."

Tears stood in her eyes. This was an unexpected good. "Doctor," she said, "you don't think he is as well?"

"I did n't expect him to be," said the doctor, fencing. "He's got to be built up."

"You said in the beginning the growth might come back."

"So it might."

"Suppose it does."

"Then we must combat it."

"Would it come in the same place?"

"It might."

"What else might it do?"

"It might attack some organ."

Her eyes were wide with fear.

"Doctor," she said, "you have n't any hope for him, have you? not a grain?"

Doctor Milbanke got up, and went over to her. He took her hands.

"Margaret," said he, "I have hope for any moving thing so long as it draws the breath of life. God bless me, child! I believe in miracles. Can't you?"

She shook her head.

"I want him to live," she said. "I want him to live. I can't imagine the earth without him."

The doctor held her hands. Then he dropped one of them, and, sitting near her, stroked the other.

"It is n't so very long for any of us," he said. "You think it is now, but it is n't."

"And then?" she asked. "Afterwards?"

"I don't know. I can't fool you there, even to comfort you. I don't know, child."

Life grew strong in her. She rose and walked away from him and then back again.

"I am tired, tired," she said. "I am tired of suffering. I almost think I shall go wrong somehow. In the night, I think of it. I am afraid my brain will fail me. Do you believe so?"

He shook his head, and smiled at her.

"No, Margaret. You won't go crazy. You'll be like a sensible woman. You'll think of your husband first, and remember he's not himself. You'll keep as near him as you can, because he may need you awfully by and by. And you'll work like the devil — pardon me! — in your profession." He brought her down from the hysteria of revolt. Her mood, the old mood of self-seeking and hunger, cooled in her. She felt again the scorn of demanding comfort for herself.

"Yes, doctor," she said, "keep me to it. That's what I really want."

When he went away, it was with his head cast down in thought. The issue was hopeless, and he knew it. Llandaff had been to Doctor Marks, according to his promise. The growth was coming again with an incredible haste. In his heart Doctor Milbanke had no hope of Algiers and the rest, but to him the living was of more value than the dead.

He wanted to get him away somewhere for the last weeks and months of the tragedy, lest it eat too deeply into Margaret's heart. If she were working at home, and working with a purpose, she could bear it better than the anguish of seeing him die, an alien to her.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DESIRE OF LIFE

LLANDAFF knew. He had none of that morbid egotism of those who go into hospital and return again to describe their pangs and show the scars of victory. He took small pride in the experience, and shrank fastidiously from the thought of it. But one night, lying in the dark, the accumulated horror of the days grew so clamorous that he had to listen. Certainty had been hunting him for weeks. He had fled, and still it dogged him. Now he turned upon the thing, looked it in the face, and took counsel of it. He got up from the couch where he had been lying, lighted the gas and bared his shoulder before the mirror. There were the scars, punctured still by the red marks of stitches. He looked at them with hatred, and an overwhelming pity for himself. Then he touched his fingers to them and the neighboring flesh. It had come, the second step that follows on the first. But there was no help for it.

He turned off the gas, and went back to the couch, but he lay there shuddering. This was that deadliest fear which arrives, not unannounced, but an expected phantom close at hand. As he lay there, it came to him that, after the very first, he had been

sure of this. It was working out like a tragedy seen long ago, and only recalled now, word by word, on a new reading. He shivered under the touch of mortality, as they shiver who have not learned to call it the garment of life without which life can walk abroad, invincible. Great loneliness was upon him. The thought of Margaret came, but only to be dismissed, a greater tragedy. At that moment, like a fated answer to his appeal, he heard Laura going up the stairs. She had come in late from the theatre. He rose without thought, guided only by hot impulse, went out of his darkened room into the hall, and followed her. Margaret listened to him, as she had to Laura, and started up in agony. She stood in the library waiting, though there was nothing to hear, save those retreating footsteps on the stairs.

Llandaff tapped at the door, a signal of his own, chosen because it gave him a feeling of greater intimacy than ringing her bell. He cared childishly for all the sentimental accompaniments of passion. Laura, going through the hall, was at hand and opened to him at once. His pallor, his disordered look, arrested her.

"What is it?" she asked.

For answer, he entered and shut the door.

"Come in here," he said hoarsely, drawing her toward the room where a light was burning. "I don't want to be in the dark."

Laura was an imposing creature in black, with her hair disordered, catching little glints from the light above. Triumph also had crowned her. The market was keeping steadily upward, and she had broken her rule of conservatism to make a daring turn. She

had caught Brownell's enthusiasm, not from him so much as from a kindred air, and had begun to believe in luck. It was with her. She looked at Llandaff with an intent scrutiny which played the part of warmth.

"What is it, old boy?" she asked caressingly, "what is it?"

He drew her to the couch, sat down beside her, and hid his eyes on her shoulder. It was not passion that drew him to her now, but the desire of comfort. She seemed so strong, so vitally alive! In her was help, if it was anywhere. Laura put up one hand to hide a yawn, and laid the other on his shaking fingers.

"What is it, old boy?" she repeated. "What's gone wrong?"

But he could not tell her. Little as he had formulated her, he guessed her scorn of weakness. She was not of that sisterhood who run to stanch a wound. He knew instinctively how his physical downfall would separate him from her. All he could do was to murmur her name over and over, "Laura! Laura!"

There was a hard day's work before her, and she longed for bed.

"There! there!" said she soothingly, as we speak to a child whose ills are passing with the word, "you've been working too late. Give me your copy in the morning. I'll take it down. You stay at home. Let Margaret coddle you."

Llandaff got up and strode away from her. He walked back and forth across the room, as if he longed to speak, and could not. Then revolt arose in him against the malignancy of his own flesh, and

he went back to her. His great need demanded great assuaging.

"Laura," he said desperately, "if you knew I had n't long to live, would you come away with me, and stay till it was over?"

Laura always knew when tragic heights were to be scaled. She preferred the lowlands, but experience had taught her how very desirable it is, at times, to mount and climb. She rose and faced him. He was not a dignified figure in this shamed self-seeking, but his need was terrible. It cried for pity. A woman born to sympathy must have answered it in some fashion, and though she denied him, made her refusal tender. Laura was slightly taller than he, and she drew herself up until she dominated him, his mood and his inches.

"I will do everything," she said, "everything a woman could do." She spoke in rounded tones of a considered weight. Some one had once said of her that she was always solemn when she was lying. That criticism lacked subtlety. It was only true that she knew what lies demanded solemnity.

Llandaff looked at her in a tremulous joy. Here seemed safety, the goal after strife, the harbor in storm.

"You love me?" he whispered. He was aglow with an emotion simulating youth. She met his eyes with a clear interchange.

"Ah," she reproved him delicately, "we must n't say those things. We must n't say them." She turned with him and they went to the door in silence. There he kissed her hands, and walked downstairs exalted by something transcending peace. Margaret,

waiting with her hands clenched, heard him come in. She sat in the darkened room where she might have seen him cross the hall, but she could not look. Joy or triumph might sit on his face, but she dared not see it.

Laura had turned back with that absorption ready to seize a mind preoccupied and called off, for a moment, to lesser things. Affairs were doing. Every night now she had to decide on her course for the morrow. Yet she never for an instant relaxed her grasp on her daily work. It went on as rigidly as if fortunes were never made on 'change and bubbles never burst there. Llandaff was dismissed from her consideration at the instant of his leaving. Indeed, he had hardly been in her mind at all, save as an accustomed figure demanding a certain emotional display, so natural now as to require no forethought. She would have had commerce with the devil to further her plans; for life, in her eyes, meant results. This or that end was desirable. You set your eyes upon some goal, and ran, with the pace necessary to attain it. Men were the pieces on her board, — men, rather than women, because they controlled affairs. She had an undefined but fully recognized table of emotions for them all, and she could move her pieces now without much spendthrift energy. After you have learned to play, you have a certain automatic insight.

Next morning, Llandaff did let her take his copy down town while he went off to Doctor Marks. It was impossible, under his present stress, to wait for office hours, and he caught the doctor going out. The surgeon read his face, and was very gentle with him.

"Is that all right?" asked Llandaff, uncovering the

scar. Doctor Marks examined it the more deliberately, to choose his words.

"It has healed beautifully," he said, with a genial air of compliment which was ghastly in the hearing. Llandaff looked at him. Their eyes met.

"I mean," he said, "can you do anything for it?"

"We shall do everything possible," said the doctor. "In absolute frankness, Mr. Warrener, I don't yet know how much."

Llandaff knew he was dismissed. Then followed the usual precautions in regard to temperance of life, to change and rest. He listened vacuously. These things, he thought, were of no account, save to take up his mind in the absence of something for the surgeon himself to do. Doctor Marks told him to come again within the month, and he went away, acquiescing. That was all a part of the game, he thought. The one was bound to offer, the other to respond.

But he got through his newspaper work very hastily that day, and with a feverish vigor. Then in the afternoon, he sat down to his designs as one would fall upon a set of business papers, to get them in order for some crisis. For the first time he looked them over critically and as a whole. His dispassionate sense, not prone to deceive itself now that life had grown so swift and eager, told him they were fakes. His work was never the best work, and this was **not** even his best. There was brilliancy about it, the offspring of his more vivid moments; but it was hurried, a hasty scramble, done for a purpose and to please a woman. The artist was afar from it; and he felt the shame of an ignoble striving. Heretofore there had never been anything cheap in his intention,

however much accomplishment had failed. He had, deep in his heart, an awed sense of the reverence to be paid those who live alone and work out beauty by some mystery of toil. He knew there was a city builded by creative minds, where no impure impulse lives, — where days are given to chisel strokes and nights to dreams of doing. This was a city builded by the ages, and inherited by the new generations who also choose to toil. If there was not a temple of art, there were many houses where art might dwell. Once he had hoped to stand at least on some such threshold ; but the wandering breezes of life had blown him aside, and now the thistledown of his hopes settled elsewhere, in a base desire.

He smiled bitterly over his work, knowing how little Brownell would guess about its genesis. Here was ambitious thought, but linked to poverty of doing, and worst of all, haste, haste. He had grasped at something and only touched its mantle. The detail was patched up, here and there, from classic memories. It was a medley of student's reminiscence. Even Laura was too ignorant to know that. He thought she recognized it and kept silence because ambition was so keen in her. She had determined on success, and as everything in her seemed worthy, that seemed worthy, too. She was Napoleonic. "Nice customs curtesy" to those who are so strong of will. But now he looked at his work only with the instinct of one who adapts it to the market-place of the fool's apprehension. He wanted to shuffle it off his hands for the money that might buy him a little life, before he should give up life forever. For as fear laid her hand upon him the more heavily, he felt strengthening

within him the feeling that, because he suffered so, the world owed him compensation. It should give him something before he was called upon to go.

That afternoon he hurried up the stairs again to Laura. He carried the bundle of sketches and laid them on her table, preoccupied, as she saw, not now with her, but with them as a way to her.

"Look these over, will you?" he said, while she took off her hat. "I want to submit them to him. I want to get them off my hands."

She sat down with him, and looked and commented. They pleased her, the meretricious detail best of all. But his tolerance forgave that in her, and even rose to admiration when he reflected that she was judging them from Brownell's standpoint and not her own. She regarded the great central group with a tempered approval, noting the crude splendor of the conception, the imperfection of its finish, and praised him for it.

"But Cræsus won't see that," she said. "He'll call it rough. We must hypnotize him." Her crass resolve seemed to him a determination nothing less than magnificent. His own scruples were poor, he thought, beside her vaulting will. As life was more than art, so the intelligence that overleaps life itself and bends all to its purpose, might be far more vital than the creeping desire which does what it may and then submits.

They sat long after the dinner hour, debating and rejecting, and their mutual will agreed. After a few unimportant changes, the designs should be submitted to Brownell as they were. Llandaff had ceased to think of the rich man as a possible factor in her life. He was only a creature stuck all over with money, as

a bee is smeared with pollen. He was a figure in a dream ministrant only to overmastering desires, as Margaret was another figure in a dream. She belonged to a childlike past, and sometimes he forgot her altogether.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MEDICINE OF EARTH

MARGARET, hearing nothing from Teresa, decided that she meant to stay, and sent down a trunk of her belongings. Brandon had done better. He went to the music store where she had been employed, and rather bullied them into mailing her a bundle of songs for translation, not only because she must live, but to take up her mind, and force her back into the track of habit. Then, one afternoon, he left the office early and took the train for Matlock. He walked from the station ; but before he came to Brownell's gate, he saw Teresa come out from the lodge and turn down the road toward the woods where he had talked with her. He followed, with a curious sense of duplicating an experience, and, watching her, came to some hopeful courage from the decision of her walk, her poise of head. She did not turn, and presently he quickened his steps to overtake her. He had a sudden reluctance to do it, for intuition told him she would not be glad. He would remind her of what she wanted to forget. But her emotion was keener than he thought. In the sudden complexity of feeling at seeing him, she hardly knew for the moment whether she did not expect St. John himself. Brandon was beside her when she looked up. " Oh ! " she breathed, and

her face crimsoned. It had changed, terribly and beautifully, into the map of mature life, — the life of grief. Yet there was no rebellion in it. It had a pure repose, the obedience of those who feel the rod and do not shrink.

"Forgive me!" he said humbly. He hardly knew why he said it, but it seemed as if he must be forgiven for coming. She gave him her hand frankly.

"I'm glad to see you," she said. "Are you — alone?"

"Oh, yes! Nobody knew I was coming. I ran away."

"Shall we go back to the house?"

"Where were you bound?"

"For a walk, anywhere. Sometimes I walk three miles, four. It does me good."

"Then let me walk with you."

They struck into the woods, where the twilight was thickening, and green shadows fell. Still, in this odd weather, the touch of a too early spring was upon everything. The air was soft, almost with the promise of buds.

"I come here every day," said Teresa.

"It's your best walk?"

"It's the quietest. I love these woods."

He was glad to hear her say she loved anything. She had got over the wholesale despair of youth; he could see she meant to live, and he took heart.

"You sent me those songs!" she challenged him.

"How do you know?"

"Of course you did. They would n't have known my address at the store."

"Well," said Brandon, after a pause, "do they treat you well here? Mother Sanders and Margot?"

She turned to him with her rare smile.

"I should say they did!" she answered. "I never imagined anything like them. The old woman is wonderful. She talks to me a great deal, — about fairies, about her people who are dead, about the world in general. She says the earth is very old. Margot cooks me the most delicious things, and Mother Sanders comes in every night, to tuck me up. I believe she says her prayers for me all day long. And they have no curiosity. They never ask a word."

"I knew that old woman was a witch the minute I saw her, — the good kind. There are two kinds of witches, you know, — good and bad, black and white. There are grays, too, I believe, but I never pay any attention to them. They are only undeveloped powers. They don't attract me." He was talking on, after his kindly fashion, to fill up the time, because it began to seem as if they had nothing real to say. He had come down with an acute sense of her lonesomeness, and he found her companioned by the woods and a wise old woman. "Better stay awhile," he said carelessly. "I'll send down your work. Change of pastures! Do you good."

"I mean to stay for the present. They let me pay my board. They seem to like me. I love them."

"Now just what does an old woman like that mean to you? What kind of companionship do you get out of her? You seem to regard her as more or less of an equal."

"An equal, no!" said Teresa, with a swift decision. "I'm not half equal to her. She is old. She has lived a whole lifetime. She has been married, and has had children. She has suffered, and got over it,

and she's got religion. I feel as if she were my mother. She's so wise and full of love."

"You stay," said Brandon, smiling at her. "It's a wholesome kind of a life. Perhaps you'll get very strong, with all this outdoor business, and coax back your voice. Have you thought of that?"

Teresa's face changed.

"My voice!" she said bitterly. "I never shall stop hearing about my voice."

"Do you want to?"

"Sometimes I think I do. Sometimes I think I want to be let alone, and never hear about it again. But I know I've got to. I've got to be hounded until I get it back, or try till I'm fifty, and give it all up. Do you know what I've begun to believe?" She walked very fast in her excitement, and Brandon lost step, fitting his stride to her haste.

"Tell me!" he said.

Her cheeks were red in a little passionate spot. She did not look at him. Her eyes were set on the distance, and her voice trembled.

"I believe," she said, as if the saying challenged fate, — "I believe I shall get back my voice."

Brandon took off his hat, tossed it up, and caught it in decorous joy.

"Hooray!" he cried.

"I have had time to think," said Teresa, paying no attention to him. "I have n't talked to this old woman down here, but somehow I'm working through her mind. You'll say I'm crazy, perhaps: but it is like getting something that grows out of the ground, some herb or root that does you good."

"I know," said Brandon. "I quite understand."

"She tells me stories of miracles and wonders. I don't accept them, but they make me see how marvelous mere life can be, and how we might put out our hand and touch something, and bring it to pass."

Brandon looked at her in amazement. The Child had grown up. She was fluent, and if her talk was childish, still it showed her mind was bubbling.

"Well," he said gently, "what can you bring to pass?"

"I can fight. I have been a coward. I sat down and folded my hands and gave up because it was the will of God. It may be the will of God, or it may not, but I shall fight."

Brandon's cool blood mounted. He liked a strenuous soul, something that flung itself into the arena ignorant of the issue of life or death, but ready because the arena called.

"What do you propose doing?" he asked.

"I have begun to do something," said the girl, her voice sinking into a more commonplace note. "I am trying to make myself well. I walk, I breathe, and then" — she stopped, and looked at him curiously for a moment. A little smile drew in the corners of her mouth. "Do you see that knoll over there?" she asked, pointing to a hillock inside the fence. "There, by the pine-tree?"

"Yes."

"Every day — twice a day — when it's pleasant, I go there to sing."

"Why there?"

"I can see the road both ways, and tell if anybody is coming. I don't want to practice at the house. They don't know I sing at all; or if they do, they never say anything."

“How does it go?”

She grew elusive at once, as one in any art may do over a doubtful issue.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Or rather, I can’t say. Don’t ask me.”

“What’s your next move?”

“I am going up to town some day. Then, if I can get money enough together, I am going to New York. I shall have my throat looked at — I shall go to some teacher — I don’t know who; I suspect I was badly taught before. But I must make them tell me what to do.” She was all burning haste, like a runner hot to be gone. Brandon caught it.

“That’s the way to talk,” he cried. “God! It does me good.”

“It’s all in the air yet. These things come to me quite confused. But when I’ve done the first one, the others will be easier.”

“Are you coming back to the house?”

“No. I wrote Mrs. Warrener to-day, to give Bebington notice.”

Brandon frowned. He felt that he had not been treated with proper consideration.

“She did n’t tell me,” he said.

“I asked her not to tell anybody.” Suddenly she was cold and unresponsive. It seemed as if the thought struck ice. Instantly he guessed that she was holding herself down, lest other more human passions rise, — passions which she might scorn or fear, according as she read her life. He could not tell.

“See here,” he said brusquely, “I am going to talk to you as I should to another man. Let me put a lump of money in your hand, and you go abroad,

care-free, to study. I believe in your voice and pluck. Let me invest in them."

"No! no! no!" she cried stridently.

"I say yes. I insist on it."

"Why should you do it?"

"Because I believe in you. I am a thrifty soul. I can't see good material lost."

She was silent a moment. He could see that she was debating within herself, quite unmoved by the necessity of conventional scruples. Then she spoke, and he saw her face harden from some determining force.

"No," she said, "I won't take any man's money. I will do it myself — or die doing it." The innocent bravado of the last phrase did not offend him, little as he liked heroics. It only brought back some savor of her old childishness, and made his heart ache to comfort her.

"Does it tempt you?" he said.

"Yes," she answered briefly, as if it were a thing of the past, "it tempts me."

"And you won't do it?"

"No, I won't do it."

"You see," said Brandon meditatively, "it would n't matter so much if it were any other kind of work. If you were living out a New England story, for example, paying off the mortgage on the farm, and only had to sit down and make overalls or feed the hens after the mortgage was paid! But when you're ready to sing, you've got to be in the flush of youth and strength. This Little Vagrant business won't lead you by that road."

Her face betrayed her. He could see how the argument hurt.

"I know," she said briefly. "But I can't. I suppose I ought to say I am grateful to you. I suppose I *am* grateful. But just now I only wonder why you do it, — and know I cannot take it."

"You owe me something," said Brandon lightly, meaning to switch her off, and then return to the attack. "I told you I was almost in love with you. You gave me a minute of youth, boyhood almost, the last I shall ever have."

"How do you know it is the last you will ever have?" she asked, with a little note of bitterness which hurt them both the instant the words were said. They felt how much she had suffered and how long a road she had gone, to sneer at anything.

"I can't tell you how I know," said Brandon gravely, "but I do know. I was so near falling in love with you that, if I had n't been such a dry old chap, I should have said I managed it. I thank you. But you leave a curious change in me. You are in effect my lady, in the language of the books. I have n't got even the memory of any woman who is more to me than you. You are the best thing that ever happened to me." He took off his hat, and walked for a moment with bowed head. She could not answer him. "You see I owe you a great deal. I've no way of paying it back. Money is absurd, between us two. But if you would take it? If you'd consider it? You don't know how easily it could be done. So simply you would n't know it was money at all!" She put out her hand to him, and he held it an instant, while he asked, with the brightness of relief, "You will?"

"No," said Teresa softly, "I can't. I can't tell

you why. I don't even know why exactly. But I've got to fight this thing out alone."

They turned and walked back to the house, not talking very much, and then only of the woods and snow.

"May I come again?" Brandon asked her, at the gate.

She hesitated a moment.

"I like to have you," she said gently. "But not yet — please, not yet." In her heart was some strange contradictory jealousy for St. John. If he could not come, neither should another man, though she liked the other man enough to be a little lonesome for him.

"Will you send for me when I may come? Or when you need me?"

"Yes," she promised gravely. "I'll send. See! Margot is beckoning. I know. They want you to come in to tea."

The happy old face was at the window, and Margot, standing above it, smiled capaciously and nodded. Both the women were looking their welcome. But Brandon took off his hat to them, with an observant courtesy, and shook his head.

"Good-night," he said to Teresa. "God bless you!"

He walked back to the station, facing the line of light in the west and the trees cleaving it, like serrated metal. He was very sad, and aware of his sadness like a youth to whom it is no familiar thing. For him it had no mystery, no luxury of woe. It was simply the wretchedness brought by memory and hope deferred. But he was conscious, as he tramped on, walking the more stiffly in a bitter raillery of himself and his elderly sinews, that not the denied passion of any youth

is like the melancholy of that time when hunger even is past, and only the likeness of hunger stays. Here was a woman fair, kind, and true. The sight of her was a pain at the heart; but that ache was but the echo of desires dead. She belonged to the haunting, elusive things of life, the twilight feeling, the response to music. In youth he would have said, "This is real." Now he only lay dumbly restive under the common humanity which brings a common pang, as the flower, broken on its stalk, feels the rain which can no longer nourish it.

"This won't do," he said at last, and turned his mind vigorously upon an article he might make out of the great reaction in women's lives, the swing of the pendulum between emotion and work. Here was Teresa. Feed her on the honey of love, and she forgot her voice. Take love away, and she remembered what she had to do. He waited a long time at the station, and, tired of thinking, it came over him that he was very wretched. "Have I got heart-ache?" he asked himself curiously. "No, it's indigestion."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE UNDYING MYSTERY

WHEN Brandon got to town, he dined at the club and then went home to find Margaret. She was alone, sitting at her window.

"I wanted to see you," she said, as he walked in. "I've had two solid hours with Greenfield. He has been talking about you."

"About me?" He put down his hat, and took a chair near her. Then he moved it, fancifully, to a point where he could not see how worried she looked, with her great eyes and pinched nostrils. His emotions had been irritated enough that day; he wanted quiet, a wholesome immunity.

"I half believe he'll give me an engagement for next season." Margaret was holding a fan, and she began furling and unfurling it, in the way women have. It made Brandon nervous, and he realized how his previous interview must have tired him. It had taken something out of him. He cared about it all more than he thought. "I wonder if I am fond of her, after all!" he reflected, his mind fleeting back to Teresa.

"He certainly would, if I'd take anything that offered," Margaret went on. "But I'm not prepared to do that yet. He'd send me on the road. What I want is to be leading lady in the new stock company."

"You'll get it." Brandon spoke half absently, half from the optimism with which he liked to treat the affairs of other people.

"I don't feel so sure of that. He distrusts me. He praised me till I wanted something, and then she flinched. But if he has a Shakespearian revival, — well, he ought to consider me."

"You would n't go on the road?"

"No." She was thinking ahead, with that way her mind had now of running fast and overtaking possible tragedy. Llandaff might need her. She would form no combination likely to take her from him. "But here's where you come in," she said, recalling herself. "If the Minervas give 'The Banished Queen' just after Lent, Mr. Greenfield proposes putting it on for a week, to try. What should you say?" She had always distrusted his coldness toward the possibility of recognition, and now there was mischief in her glance.

"Jove!" cried Brandon irrepressibly. He started up from his chair, and went to the table, where he displaced books vigorously. "He won't!" he said illogically, turning away, hands in his pockets. He faced her, frowning.

"*I* think he will," said Margaret. She had discovered the hidden self, and was glad it had some vigor. "If it goes — and I fancy it will — he'll think very seriously of it. Anyway he is going to talk it over with you."

"Jove!" said Brandon again. He came back to his chair. "But what does Greenfield know about it, anyway?"

"I've done some more scenes for him."

"Ah!" It was, in spite of him, a long sigh of satisfaction. He was like all the rest. Recognition, in a small way, had come, and it was delicious to him. Even this amount of tacit praise was sweet in the nostrils, for if Margaret had not liked the play she would not have foisted it on Greenfield. "What did he say?" he asked irrepressibly. Margaret's eyes sparkled.

"Bully!" she roared, in Greenfield's own voice. Brandon laughed.

"Which scenes did you do?" he asked, like a child.

She told him. He shook his head. "Ah," said he, "they're not the best."

"But they're the best for Greenfield."

"You've been stalking him, then?"

"Yes. I knew he had only to hear it."

"I wish those ungodly Minervas had n't got the first hack at it!"

"Never mind. They've changed their plans. They're to give it in a theatre, not that miserable little hall."

"What theatre?"

"The Coliseum. For three days it supersedes 'continuous vaudeville.'"

Brandon got up again, and paced the floor.

"'Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,' " he said whimsically. "But it makes me nervous. It scares me blue."

"The Coliseum!" repeated Margaret, still watching him indulgently. "The Minerva benefit. Tickets, three dollars. Widely advertised. The public admitted."

"Not live men! I understood it was a sort of hen convention."

"Ah, so it was, in the beginning. But they've changed all that. They like their play."

"But they're not going to have young bachelor goddesses doing kings and courtiers. I protest I won't have petticoated statesmen. That'll spoil the whole business."

"Oh, never mind that! They don't. Why should you?"

Brandon gloated, and then inwardly called himself a fool.

"What's the use?" he inquired. "What's the good of behaving like an ass because I've tossed up and won some little local celebrity? If I were twenty-five, if it would lead to something! There! Bless you, Mrs. Warrener; you've lobbied for me and given me a glorious quarter of an hour. But it's only fifteen minutes, after all. Let me turn my back on it. I've just been down to see Teresa Hope."

"Ah!" said Margaret, in great interest. "How is she?"

"Well."

"Is she coming back?"

"Not here, she says."

"You say she's really well?"

"She's not only well, but aggressive, like some sort of bird with gray plumage that's gone and got a false beak, to look bloodthirsty, and painted herself red." He spoke in his old ironical way, chiefly because the memory of Teresa hurt him so. She was brave, she suffered, and he tried to find her a little exaggerated. When he felt tears in his eyes, he called upon burlesque to help him.

"Is she — unhappy?" Margaret spoke doubtfully, not knowing whether she ought to ask.

"Yes," said Brandon, stridently, his lighter vein suddenly failing him. "She is: most damnably and youthfully unhappy."

"Are you persuading her not to see him?"

"No."

"Yet you don't want her to see him?"

"Assuredly I don't."

"Sometimes," said Margaret warmly, "I think he has the right. If she loves him, he certainly has the right."

"Love! love!" growled Brandon. "How you all juggle with that word! You use it as unconcernedly as I use a shoelacing. Love! It is the most irresponsible, egotistical, greedy, hydrocephalous passion in the world. It goes tearing about like an idiot, not knowing why or whither, and you say, 'Get out of the way! it has divine right.' 'Look out!' you cry, 'it's coming.'"

The blood mounted slowly to Margaret's cheeks. She had not been called on for anything but mimic passion in all these days. Her real self, drugged into silence, had seemed dead. But now it sprang into being. Her voice thrilled, but she held it steady. Since Llandaff had sneered at her counterfeit of emotion, all the shows of it seemed frozen in her heart.

"It has its own rights," she repeated. "You treat it as if it were some simple fact. It is a mystery."

"It is no mystery at all, except in being entirely erratic and unaccountable. Look what it makes you do. You see a creature who seems to the entire world merely a man. You have ties, duties. You're consumptive, or in debt, or touched in the brain. But

you say, 'I'm in love!' And off you go and marry." He was all the more fractious because his mind kept dwelling on Teresa, her sweetness, her suffering, her remoteness, in that walled tower of reserve. Margaret would not answer him, or she could not. To summon words effectively, she had to be at white heat. Wholesale and aggressive statements always knocked her down, by their personal impact. She shifted her ground to one where facts would serve her.

"Mr. Brandon," she asked, "why do you want to separate them?"

"Because," said Brandon whimsically, "because I don't fancy him."

He was already ashamed of saying too much about St. John; he had resolved never to attack the man again.

"Ah, that's small! That's not like you."

Brandon felt the satisfaction of one silent for conscience' sake. "I can't help it," he said doggedly.

"If he cares for her, he has a right to see her. You may separate them for good and all. You may prevent their marrying."

"I? She prevents it herself. She did n't want to see him. Told you so herself."

"Ah, but she did n't mean it!" said Margaret, with woman's insight, probing the other woman's heart.

"She has a natural resentment" —

"She has no resentment. She only wants to see him."

"Then she's the silliest child yet. You say I may have prevented their marrying. You put it as if I'd committed a crime. Prevented their marrying! I hope I have."

"Why do you?"

"Because that particular partnership ought to be consummated with the greatest circumspection. If I hinder one that has every prospect of going to smash, I'm a public benefactor. Here are two people rushing together in defiance of common sense and experience, and you blame me for interposing an arm."

Tears came into Margaret's eyes. They were tears of despair over her dumbness.

"It is n't a partnership," she said.

"What is it, then?" asked Brandon. He was too much absorbed by his own emotions to think very much about hers. "Oh, I know! a sacrament. That's what they say: a sacrament."

"And it is!" she flamed, finding her tongue because now she was careless whether she spoke well or ill. "It is a mystery. What right have you or anybody else to separate two people who love each other? Suppose they come to grief. What then? Have you any business to prevent their coming to grief? I tell you there is something between them you can't understand. No, you can't understand it." Her eyes were wet with tears. Brandon was looking at her now, recalled from his egotistical reverie.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Warrener," he said gently. "You know I talk from the habit of talking. And I've not been very fortunate. I have n't kept many of what we call ideals. It is a mystery, as you say, this attraction of the one for the other. But it does n't seem to me merely a beautiful mystery — you must pardon me — it seems very sad."

"What can it mean to you, to make you so hopeless?" asked Margaret beseechingly. "What can it mean?"

"It means only the flowering of the world, the great fecundity. Some buds bring forth blossoms; some only ache, and die in the sun. Nature does n't care a hang for the individual life, but she lets it participate in the general pulsing because it would n't pay her to be honest with it. She lets it think she cares, but it's only to get her schemes accomplished. And that's one reason why there's so much pain in it. I want everybody to escape with as little pain as possible. I want that girl down there to have her life made safer for her. I don't want her to fly right into the flames and get her wings burnt up. Good God! if you'd only wait a little, you creatures with the horses of the sun. If you'd only take a hack! A herdic, now! It's a little bumpy, and the wheel may come off, but you can't go really wrong with a herdic."

Margaret looked at him still with those burning tears in her eyes.

"It is n't so," she repeated. "It has a hidden law. Does n't it mean anything to you that the creature you love is different from any one in all the world? You recognize him at once. He is yours. You see him as nobody else does."

"My dear lady," said Brandon sadly, "you'll think I am a lower animal when I tell you that the added glory is only in the passion of love itself. You see a person; you superimpose upon his real qualities an additional set of qualities evolved by your brain when a certain madness comes upon you. Don't ask me why the madness descends. I don't know. But you create an imaginary being, all lusted over with the beauty — or the longing — of your brain. The passion holds, or it passes. But if it passes, you see the creature as he is."

At that moment Margaret held herself fortunate because she was so much richer in her belief than he in his denial. He seemed to her very sad in the poverty of his loneliness. Better to be the fool, pleased with her gilded state, than the wise man denying that kingdoms are. But this she felt only because she was so sure that there were kingdoms. She could not reason, but she saw.

"But why?" she persisted. "If it has n't any meaning, why love one rather than another?"

"I don't know. It is all an ineffable dream, made up of a thousand sensations, a million inheritances. You see a light in certain eyes, and fling yourself forward blindly to burn and die, or be forever blest. But those same eyes may be looking at a cabbage with the identical lustre they had for you. The spark you saw is some floating, ethereal thing filched in passing by the soul at birth."

"Yes," she cried triumphantly, "but all the false implies the true. You may wander a million years, and find your mate at last."

"God grant you may!" said Brandon with no simulated fervency. "If I could find my true mate" — He got up, and stood looking down on her, smiling sadly. "You have n't much opinion of me, have you?" he asked, with that whimsical smile of his which was also a loving one.

Margaret put out her hand, and he took it.

"I can't talk about it," she said. "I'm too tongue-tied. But you are wrong. You reason. I know."

"God grant you do," said Brandon, turning away. "I don't object to flowers and lights and music. They set my blood tingling, too. Only, I can't live in a high fever."

"I tell you frankly," said Margaret, when he had reached the door, "that if he asks me for her address, I may send him down to her."

Brandon frowned.

"Very well," he concluded, "you 've a perfect right to. *I* have n't the right, and I shan't. But, Mrs. Warrener" — he returned to her, and spoke meaningly — "if St. John asks you where she is, do me this favor: don't tell him until you have first demanded of him what cause or impediment there is in the way of his going down there. Good-night."

When he had gone, Margaret sat thinking, not sadly, with lagging processes of pale thoughts, as she had for months, but in an exaltation foreign to her. His attack had been a challenge, like persecution to the neophyte who has not yet spoken what he believes. The great fact in the world seemed to her at that moment love, and especially the love between man and woman. It transcended everything he had to say. "Behold I show you a mystery." Infinite sacrifice, infinite pain, these might be in it, but they made it more divine. She had a vision as the inarticulate may, although they cannot paint it. Love! the very word was beatific to her. It meant something which had its rise in the secret source of being. It was the great lot God apportioned men, the chance for building up a spiritual body between two natural ones. The two souls elect each other. The beloved is beautiful, not from some juggling of the vision, but because his real radiance has become for a moment apparent. He may not be more beautiful than other souls, seen as they are, but the vision is too circumscribed to include more than the one. Then, the bond once made, the

orbits of the two may fly asunder ; but something remains. If there has been any faithfulness, any truth, any patient surrender, something is left, eternal in the heavens.

Margaret thought of Llandaff again as if he belonged to her. It was like a mother's drawing her child back into her arms. They two had built up between them something that was indestructible, inasmuch as they had once put their whole heart into it; and she resolved passionately that she, left by herself, would add unto it, stone upon stone. It was worth the pain, as the child is worth the travail. She saw more plainly than she ever had the complex longings of the human soul: how it seeks out various food, and if an austere righteousness does not uphold it, eats of forbidden fruit. He had turned to Laura. Margaret could not lie to suit her craving instincts, and deny the reality of that hunger. It might be as real as her own love for him; only, since it made him a traitor, he must fight, and she must help him fight. She began to see life, not as a completed relation, but an eternal progress. All the force of her nature swept into emotion. She could not formulate in words; she could only feel, and then rush forward in a self-forgetting haste.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONFESSION

MARGARET, in her partisanship of St. John, took pains to be kinder than ever, in their several meetings; but he did not come to her rooms. He grew every day more haggard. His was one of the faces that show anxiety in a degree so superlative as to be unfair. It sets no limit to sympathy. Even Margaret was impatient at the extent of her concern over him. She began to suspect that she was sorrier for him than he deserved, only because his eyes laid claim upon her. One day, they came in and up the stairs together. At her door, she hesitated a moment, with sudden resolution. Then she turned away. But to St. John the motion promised something. He followed her in, and, while she was taking off her hat, stood looking at her with an expectation which brightened his face, and made her doubly sorry.

"Well!" she said, half whimsically, and drew forward a chair for him.

He did not take it.

"Have you a message for me?" he asked.

"No."

"Not a word?"

"No."

He turned away.

"I beg your pardon," he said, recurring to his air

of old-fashioned ceremony. "I thought — you looked as if" — He had reached the door when she called him back. Her mind overrode obstacles. She only felt at once that he really loved Teresa. All Brandon's philosophizing was nothing in comparison with human hearts.

"I'll tell you this," she said. "She is well."

He returned swiftly. She sat down, and he took a chair opposite. His face changed miraculously. It quivered. The eyes besought her.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"No."

"You have heard from her?"

"Yes, I have heard from her. She is well, and very courageous. You need not be troubled about her."

"But I *am* troubled about her," he said, "I *am* very much troubled." In that broken utterance, Margaret saw that he was not thinking in the least of himself, but only of the girl; and her heart went out to him. She leaned forward, and touched his hand with hers. He looked up at her, and met the imploring earnestness of her eyes.

"Mr. St. John," she said, "if you saw her, you'd tell her the truth, whatever it is? You would n't let her make any mistake?"

"Where is she?" cried St. John. Immediately Margaret was the more his champion. She saw he did not even consider her own scruples, nor would he make her any promise. His eyes were on fire. "Where is she?" he asked.

Margaret leaped her fence, her blood rising at the prospect of seeing him leap his.

"She is at Mr. Brownell's country house," she said, "at the lodge, with that old woman."

St. John rose at once. He took her hand, and gripped it. His face was not so much glad as resolved in the prospect of action after days of muddy thought. Then he was gone, and Margaret heard him running down the stairs. She laughed aloud, and remembered that she had not asked him Brandon's question. She was lighthearted to the point of joy; she had set somebody on the road to happiness.

That forenoon Teresa, writing in her little bedroom, was beckoned out by Margot, with smiling encouragement, toward the sitting-room. It was a visitor, she understood, and at once she guessed at Brandon and was glad. She might forbid him to come, but he brought with him the atmosphere of the place she loved and longed for. It was half like seeing St. John, with an ache of disappointment added. She put her papers away, and went into the little sitting-room bright with tidies and smiling in the sun; and there was St. John himself. He came forward to meet her, but he did not offer her his hand. In her one look at him, she saw how he had changed, and her heart went out to him in the first delicious throb of that mothering which is a part of woman's love for man. A great wave of red went up over her face, and then faded, leaving her paler than before. She seemed to him infinitely pathetic; but while he longed to take her in his arms and comfort her, he felt that she was removed from him and all such comforting. He drew forward a chair.

"Sit down," he said gently. Then he took a seat near her, and tried to think what he could say. But

his eyes would feed upon her face, and Teresa seeing that, the color came again. She caught her breath, and knew she was happy. He was here. He was alive. That was enough. They two made the only significant spot in the world. They were a centre of being. "But you look well," he said at last, with some wonder in his tone.

"I am well," she answered. At the sound of her voice, shaken though it was, she took courage. They must talk. She must convince him that he owed her nothing. Before he came, she had determined that if ever they met again, she would show him, for his own ease, how little she cared for what had passed and left her scatheless. She had simply established a claim upon him by her ignorant hotheadedness, and he should be released. But now, in his presence, the great validity of the bond between them was the only thing she could remember, and the singleness of her truth toward him alone.

"I have just found out where you were," he said. It was not easy for a man of halting speech to seek even the preamble for all he meant to say. "You did n't mean to let me know. Why did n't you?"

"I am very busy," said Teresa, with her first evasion, "translating."

St. John's one determination was, in manliness, to suggest nothing which might turn her heart to him. But his tongue betrayed him.

"Don't be hard on me," he pleaded. "I deserve it. I deserve anything you can say. But don't — don't put me away from you."

"I have n't anything to say," answered Teresa gently. She was bitterly sorry for him.

"I have. I've got a lot to say. I am not at all the kind of person you thought me."

"Don't!" she besought him. She wanted to add a thousand things, all tender, all full of her manifold love. But chiefly she felt that nothing mattered now that he had come. It was only to go away again. She knew that. But the great fact was, he was here. She would listen or not, but she would store up every minute, every trick of his speech, every look, for the time when there should be no possibility of seeing him again.

"I've got to tell you. I'm a poor sort of person. I have wasted my life in being lazy, and following where other people led me. You thought I was different."

This was her time. She spoke hotly.

"Oh, I know! You did n't make me care for you. I cared. I insisted on doing it. You are not to blame."

"I have n't come to that yet," said St. John. He was so poor a speaker that his mind insisted patiently on taking the only road it saw. "I never amounted to anything. God knows why you should think I amount to anything now." He went back remorselessly, and, in his meagre way, the more incisive because it was so bare, set forth before her all his futile life. When he came to Olga, Teresa's hands trembled in her lap, and she grew very cold. But she did not blench. St. John spared her, as he spared himself, nothing. He was talking about things which are commonplaces in worldly speech; but his inflamed sensitiveness to her nature made him see through her eyes, and suffer with her.

"Yes," she said, when he had finished. "I understand. You must be married. I see."

"Then," St. John continued without heeding her, "when I came back to America, I found you. I don't believe you know what that was to me."

"Oh, I know!" said Teresa eagerly. Her wounded heart was all aflame to defend him from what had been her own impulsiveness. "You were sorry for me, because I had lost my voice. You must not be sorry any more. I am going to get it back. You were sorry for me, and I thought it was — different. I was to blame." She spoke, not like a girl ashamed of giving her love unsought, but with an unworldly purity. Conventional scruples did not enter into it.

St. John looked at her, shocked.

"Did you think that?" he asked.

"I know that," said Teresa.

He got up, walked away to the window, and then came back again. His eyes were hot with tears. His heart had supplied the lack of imagination, and he saw the Child alone, deserted, feeling that she had never been loved. "Good God!" he said, "how you must have suffered."

Teresa shuddered all over. It was not her habit to cry.

"It is true," she said. "You need not shirk it. You cared about my voice, and I cared about you."

"You thought that!" said St. John, forgetting the resolutions under which he had come. "Why, Child, I loved you! Did n't I tell you so? I don't know whether I said it to you — I did n't know there was any need of saying it. We understood each other."

It made me forget. I loved you. There's nothing in this damned unfeeling world but you."

He stretched out his hands to her, and then drew them sharply back. Teresa sat and looked her happiness in the face. It had come again. She was overwhelmed by the glory of it. Not for a minute did she forget the facts that would separate them. He was going away from her. He was going back to another woman. He would never see her again. Yet the present moment bloomed and showered its fragrance over them. But the thought of Olga returned upon her like a spectre. In spite of herself, Teresa asked a question.

"Does she care about you?"

He made an impatient gesture.

"God knows," he said; "I don't."

"Don't deceive me. You must know."

"I tell you, Child, I don't. I don't know whether she's fond of me, or whether she's only used to me. I don't know whether she'd like to marry me, or whether she's tired of knocking about. That shocks you, does n't it. You think I'm a brute."

She was regarding him with distended eyes, challenging in their purity. He had never realized how young she was, with the youth of the soul. To her, all relations were still ideal and absolute. Life was either black or white, not gray. You went to the altar with love, or you did not go at all. You adored your wife, or you were a villain. He guessed at that absolute yea and nay of her untaught nature, and for a moment despair seized him at the gulf between them and the unlikelihood of their finding even a common plane of talk. But that was really of no importance. The only vital thing was to keep her from suffering.

"What I want now is to know you are happy," he said, "I've got to know that."

"You shall know it," she said bravely. Young as she was, woman's tasks were thrust upon her, and she accepted them. "You cared about my voice. I shall get it back, because you want me to."

"If I could help you do it"—He stopped, conscious that there was no way of going on. Brandon had been able to offer bluntly what he had to give; but this man had hurt her, and so, in some fashion, shut himself away from her.

"You will help," said Teresa hastily. "I shall be doing it for you. That can't be wrong. At least, I think it can't, as I feel now."

Her poor little face looked pinched and eager in its questioning. The man turned his eyes away from her. He was suffering that bitterest pang of all, the knowledge of having hurt what he so loved.

"And I am not to help?" he said at length. "You shut me out."

She was silent. He had to be shut out, but it wounded her to say so.

"I owe it to you to be what you wish," she answered at length, her voice dropping for lack of breath. "I insisted on coming into your life. I disturbed it. I made it unhappy. Now, I owe it to you to let you see you have n't done me harm, but good. You shall see it is better for me than if I had n't known you."

"But think of me, Teresa," he said sadly. "You say you owe me something. Don't I owe you something too?"

"Yes," she said, with the courage that had come

of a reiterated vow, "you do. But you've got to pay it — somewhere else."

He rose, and stood before her.

"Teresa," he insisted, "do you really think that? Is a promise made as I told you, to outweigh everything between us two? Is the life I lived then to be paid for now, out of your blood as well as mine? If I were the only one to pay" — He stopped, and made a futile gesture of the hand.

Teresa rose, too. The interview had gone far enough, and she knew it. Her own heart beat with his. Her revolt was greater, even, against the unclean bond that held him. Yet it was a bond, and if it were to be broken, it should not be through her. She was not lacking in courage, but having, as she thought, made one mistake, she dared not make another.

"I don't know," she said, looking at him blindly. "I only know we mustn't steal" — Her voice broke. "You will have to go," she added. "I can't see you any more."

"I can't see you!" He turned the phrase, and made it suit his own necessity.

"No. It makes it harder, in the end."

"And I can't do anything for you?"

"Yes! yes!" she cried, in haste, lest he should go quite comfortless. "You can do something all the time."

He knew what she meant, and in the simplest way resolved to do it. She expected of him all the holy vows of life, the knighthood of the soul. Neither of them had any words for it, but the one demanded and the other answered.

"I know, dear," he said, "I know. But I'm a stupid fellow. I shall make mistakes."

He looked at her beseechingly, but in her young and austere sacrifice it seemed wrong to give her hand to him. So he left her without a word.

CHAPTER XXXIII

PLAYING THE GAME.

BROWNELL was in full swing of a popularity based on his commercial greatness. He was invited to dinner by magnates and, inviting them in turn, thought they listened to him with the same respect they felt for one another. Apparently he was no small figure in the arena where deeds are done and fortunes piled ; but really he had only fallen in with a clique moved by some very definite ideas of his usefulness. He thought they were allowing him to manipulate affairs, whereas they were only manipulating him. His financial connection was so restricted that he never heard the judgment of other men upon the two who had him in hand. He was swimming about a fish-pond, and calling it the sea. Laura weighed his wrongheadedness, and got an anxious line between the eyes.

"How many shares of 'Hesperides' are you holding?" she asked him when they sat at dusk in her room.

Again he told her.

"Double what you had before? You have been buying again, cash down?"

"I bought some of it on a margin, the rest at sixty days."

"Suppose the market breaks?"

"The market won't break. If it does, 'Hesperides' will be taken care of. They've got it pegged."

"Yes, with whose money? When a block of stock is thrown on the market, who buys it in?"

"Well, I did, last Wednesday," said Brownell, looking worried, not over his prospects, but at her persistency.

"Have they proposed buying 'Jason' of you?"

"Yes."

"Aha! I knew it. What answer did you give?"

"Told 'em no."

"Why did you?"

He looked almost cunning. Through one error, he thought he had learned wisdom.

"I sold out once too cheap. See where that mine is now! I've sent a man out to look 'Jason' over. So have they. If it's worth it, — well, I guess I can bring it on the market without their help."

"You can't!" she told him bluntly. "Keep them hanging on. They're bribing you for 'Jason.' While they do it, sell out 'Hesperides.'"

"Haste makes waste," said Brownell, with a meaningless calm; and seeing more maxims on the way, she cried out despairingly, —

"Oh, won't you listen to me? I've been through this with my hundreds where you risk thousands. I've won and lost three times. I ought to be three times more prudent than you; but I'm a hundred. Sell out. Realize."

"I can't," he said as he had said before. "I'm pledged to them."

But he said it jauntily, with a confidence that sat ill upon him, because it was foreign to his nature.

The gods were destroying him, according to the old prescription. They had made him mad. But his mind recurred, as it always did, to her. "Lost your little pile three times, did you?" he asked tenderly. He had forgotten her former denial of ever having been in the market at all. Since she had resolved upon winning him, he had forgotten many things.

Laura answered absently, looking through him with unseeing eyes, and wondering what might move him.

"Yes," she said indifferently. "But it does n't matter. It was the fortune of war. It taught me something. It forced me to be prudent. Realize! realize! We little people can't afford great risks. Don't you know that?"

But to himself, Brownell was not in the least a little person, financially considered. He could lay his hand at that moment on his profits, and they were colossal.

"You are a dear girl," he said. "You don't want me to lose."

He felt for her that noble tenderness a soldier, armed for battle, might cherish for the delicate creature who bids him stay. This was the feminine attitude. It became her. He fought for her in the marketplace, and she, at home, stretched out white arms and entreated him to ease. Laura regarded him abstractedly, weighing his chances of escaping with a hide untouched. She resolved not to bind her fortunes too irrevocably to his. He might stay in the market and await the crash, but she would not await it with him. Yet if he could realize, a part of the spoils, in some

way, would be hers. He could not be allowed to gamble away her prospects, even if she had to pay, or promise to pay, the greatest price of all.

"Ah!" she cried passionately, "you won't do anything for me. I thought you would. Oh, I thought you would!" There were tears in her voice. It was an emotion as moving as it was unexpected, and Brownell responded so quickly that relief sprang up in her, finding him such easy game.

"There's nothing in the world I would n't do for you!" he vowed. He came nearer and took her hand. "Look at me, my girl," he said brokenly. "Why, bless your little heart! it's all for you. Dear, ain't you going to marry me?"

Some grotesque remembrance of popular novels came upon her, and she could have smiled, realizing that he was of that class who would expect the heroine to "murmur, 'Yes.'" She rose, and with one step retreated from him. There, at safe distance, she did murmur, —

"Do you want me?"

"Want you?" He was breathless, and yet reverent of her. "Girl, don't you know what I've meant all this time? Why, I'm fond of you. I beseech you to marry me — short off."

She smiled upon him. "Not short off," she said, "but some time."

"You will? Ah, my girl, just let me kiss your hand." He was as exquisite in his understanding of what he thought her shyness as a courtier could have been. "Won't you? Then sit down, dear. I won't come no nearer."

She took her chair again, and he regarded her

beatifically, trying, since he might not approach too near, not to dwell upon his bliss. He beamed upon her.

"Now," he said, "let's talk about what we'll do. Should you like to go to Europe?"

"I don't believe I care for Europe," she answered.

Brownell was pleased. He had had enough of Europe on his grand tour. By some trick of an obstinate self-assertion, he had contrived to be in every place at the wrong time. He had been robbed by couriers, patronized at hotels, and irritated by the traveling English, for whom he had dug up a hatred due to Bunker Hill. He regarded the whole thing as a colossal pageant, where everybody might be comfortable if modern conveniences had been put in, but where you are compelled to suffer hunger and cold and persecution in a category only inferior to that of St. Paul. "Well, I'm mighty glad of it," said he. "You should have it, though. You're going to have every individual thing you ask for. What suits you'll suit me, but I kinder hoped you'd want to settle down and make a home here. You shall cut a dash if you want to. There's means enough."

"I don't care much for cutting a dash, either," said Laura, smiling on him. It was true that this one temptation had never beset her. She saw no pleasure in that painful climb uphill, scattering coin by the way. It tickled her sense of humor to see men put money in their purses and then bow down to the dull social god, crying "Conform!" What she did want was luxury, superlative comfort, and at the same time some handling of the powers of life: handling them, too, as men may do, not indirectly, in the way of women.

Brownell had been watching her fondly. His emotion toward her was tinged with a sincere humility. Outside the question of trade, he was ready to bid her put her foot upon his neck. In his mind, swayed by old ideals, love for woman was all compact of reverence, and, hard as he tried to compass it, at that moment he could not even call her by her name. With mental recurrence to country usage, he addressed her in his mind as "You," and wondered whether he could ever do more by word of mouth.

"There 's one thing I wish you 'd kinder find time to bring about?" he said, as if he asked a favor.

"What?"

"I wish we could run out to western New York and see Claribel."

Claribel, the unseen, was the ghost of the castle Laura was allowing him to build up for her. She had no time to decide now whether Claribel was to be accepted in the flesh, or whether, with the possibility that they might never meet, she was to be put off, from time to time. She smiled at him warmly.

"Not yet," she said. "You don't know how busy I am. Wait for my vacation."

"I could bring her on here!"

"Not quite yet, Mr. Brownell! I could n't give my mind to her. Wait a little, till my work slows up, and I am out of the market."

Brownell was disappointed, but he had the obedience of the lover to his lady.

"Now, business!" said Laura briskly. "Do you know my cousin has his designs ready for inspection?"

"Sho!" said Brownell, "that 's good. Well, all in good time. The twenty-third 's pretty nigh."

"Have many been sent in?"

"Yes. The typewriter girl's got charge of 'em. She puts down the names. I have n't looked at any of 'em yet. No fair till the twenty-third!"

"Do you mind looking over Mr. Warrenner's with me? I want to explain them, talk them over. You will find it far easier to judge if I tell you what he has tried to do."

"Sure! Any time you say."

"I ought to help you decide, ought n't I? If it's going to be your house, you want me to be pleased, too."

Brownell got up and approached her awkwardly. He bent over her, and touched his lips to her hair.

"It's your house, my girl," he said. "Every stone of it will be yours. You've got to be suited."

"Then," said Laura imperatively, pointing to his chair, "I must be one of the committee. You and I are the ones to be considered. We do the judging. Sit down, and let me ask you something else."

He went back to his place, and regarded her adoringly. She seemed all womanly, and yet so strangely masterful in her manly qualities.

"Llandaff is poor," said Laura.

"We'll do something for him."

"No! there's nothing to be done. He would n't accept it. Only, if he wins the prize, give it to him at once, will you — without a day's delay? He needs the money."

"On the nail!"

"Very well, then. You'll come to-morrow night, and look them over?"

"Can't. There's a dinner on. The directors!"

"To-morrow, at four?"

"That 'll do."

"Then next day, perhaps you could have the other designs sent down here, and you and I could go over them."

"Right you are."

"Because," she added, with the finest candor, "I can't help feeling you 'll want Llandaff's, whether you use them for that particular purpose. You must remember I was his model, in nearly every case. They're simply portraits of me. Now — I've got some proof to do."

She had rapidly decided against making a test question of the market yet. For a day or two he was safe. Her jackal had some inside news which she believed in. Later, when the prize money had been safely settled, she would return to the charge, and sway him by her blood and will.

Brownell rose, at the mention of proofs. He was indulgent to her profession, knowing it was not to last, and he foresaw her smiling back on it from heights of splendor, glad she had ended it triumphantly. They parted at the door, and there he kept her hand and looked at her entreatingly.

"My girl," he said, "you're sort of hard on me!"

She shook her head smilingly.

"No! no!" she answered. "No! You must be good. Not until you've done something for me, something I want."

"What do you want?"

"I'll tell you. All in good time."

"Tell me now, and then — Kiss me, my girl!"

"No! no!" she said, "not yet." And he went,

"Not depressed — or bothered? You may be, you know. You've been through a good deal of a strain."

"Oh, no! I'm not depressed," said Llandaff vaguely, looking out of the window; and the doctor, studying his eyes, realized with a throb of pity that the man was afraid. The fox was gnawing at him, and he had no philosophy to cool the pain.

"I wish I had the handling of you," he said vigorously. "I should prescribe a vacation." Llandaff laughed, with some bitterness.

"I'm so tired of that word, doctor," said he. "You've got your stock phrases, all of you, — 'vacation,' 'alteratives,' 'build up,' 'eggnog.'"

"Yes," said the doctor good-naturedly. "We've all got them. I'm a crank on reactions, myself. I think when the operation is over, the case is just beginning. The surgeon is a workman. He does his job, and turns you out. 'Next!' says he. That's all very well. He's no time to coddle you. But you just hear to your old granny of a family doctor — that's me, Llandaff! — you heed him when he tells you to knock off work, and come abroad. Come with me, Llandaff. I'm going."

The doctor was only going if Llandaff would go with him. But he had definitely made up his mind that if he could take the man away, he would. It might put Margaret on her feet again, and Llandaff also had some tacit claim on him. This was one of his responsibilities, assumed long ago, and continued through one emergency after another. Llandaff looked at him, in sudden and acute suspicion.

"I may go abroad," he said. "I'm thinking of it."

CHAPTER XXXIV

REPEATED HISTORY

THE next afternoon, within an hour of Brownell's coming, Doctor Milbanke was sitting with Llandaff, watching him keenly and replying to his desultory talk. With some instinct of hiding, not to be defined even to himself, Llandaff had refrained from speaking about his changed condition. Possibly he was afraid Margaret might be told; or he had the longing of the hurt animal, to "creep into sedges." The doctor had been consulting with Marks, and he regarded Llandaff curiously, wondering at his reserve. Warrener looked wretchedly undone, especially now, in his shame at the part he was presently to play. To his wearied brain, the drawings were incredibly worse; but whatever they might be, he knew how Laura meant to tip the scale, with every atom of her strength and charm. That was disgrace, — a disgrace already well accomplished. It separated him the more from the life he had meant to live, and the clean men who were living it. He talked fitfully to the doctor, but that was not unusual; at any moment now these sudden broodings fell upon him.

"How do you find yourself these days?" asked the doctor, perhaps to spur him on.

Llandaff looked at him suspiciously. "Oh, I'm well enough!" he said, "well enough for anybody."

"Not depressed — or bothered? You may be, you know. You've been through a good deal of a strain."

"Oh, no! I'm not depressed," said Llandaff vaguely, looking out of the window; and the doctor, studying his eyes, realized with a throb of pity that the man was afraid. The fox was gnawing at him, and he had no philosophy to cool the pain.

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The doctor was only going if Llandaff would go with him. But he had definitely made up his mind that if he could take the man away, he would. It might put Margaret on her feet again, and Llandaff also had some tacit claim on him. This was one of his responsibilities, assumed long ago, and continued through one emergency after another. Llandaff looked at him, in sudden and acute suspicion.

"I may go abroad," he said. "I'm thinking of it."

"But go with me! Come, now, don't give an old fellow the mitten. Let me take two passages in the 'Cynthia' for Egypt, — the Holy Land if you want to. It would be a charity to me."

At that moment, all the doctor's growing dislike of him was swallowed up in compassion. He was making an enormous sacrifice, but looking at the patient, he found him ill enough to justify the pains. Llandaff did feel grateful, but he smiled his denial.

"No, doctor," he said, "you're awfully good, but I can't. I may go, but if I do, I shall go" — He meant to add "alone," but the word stuck in his throat. He remembered that, for the last days, he had lived only on the thought that Laura might go with him.

The doctor got up, and took his hat and stick.

"Well," said he whimsically, "I am rejected. But I shall cherish a hope. The offer is open."

When he had gone, Llandaff stood a moment in the middle of the floor, thinking hard. He was very susceptible to the human atmosphere. He took the doctor for granted, as we do the older men and women to whom we have been used; but nevertheless, though he did not formulate him, the doctor stood in his life for what was decent, manly, clean. He felt suddenly, with a sickening revulsion, what that man would say to the trickery about to be perpetrated in this room. It was disgrace. It was malpractice. He looked at the pile of drawings where they lay awaiting the ignorant eye of the Philistine who was to be cozened into taking them. It was a "most filthy bargain." It touched professional honor, which was a more valid thing to him at that moment than any social tie. He

saw himself clearly, and felt, in the seeing, that, if he repudiated his wife for another woman, he should not, in his own eyes, be lost; but if he denied his calling, not even the other woman could save him. It struck him so vividly that it seemed, in one great flush of hope, as if it must strike Laura also. He felt within him the power of persuasion. She also must catch fire. Alive with hope, he ran up to her door.

"Come!" she called. The latch was up, and he entered.

"Oh, you!" said she. "I left the door for Cræsus." She was sealing and stamping letters, and with one look at his face she rose and came to meet him. She had dressed for the fray, not for his eyes, but Brownell's. Her velvet dress was shimmering in peacock dyes, the product of her last plunge. It had been bought after a night when she saw Brownell at the theatre, and he indicated a kingly robe with the delirious comment, —

"Ain't that a ripping color?"

She meant to surprise him, when he came to-night, with her sumptuousness, her charm, to take him off his feet and leave him where he would have his whistle at any price. When it came to the drawings, she proposed to hypnotize him into pronouncing his own fiat, and then to let him sign the check. But a look at Llandaff showed the mountain in the way. There was little time to remove it by any special pleading. Yet she advanced securely, smiling at him. She looked triumphant, almost beautiful, and with a meaning which, for the moment, outweighed beauty.

"Don't speak to me," she said, her cold voice wonderfully moved. "I am so happy." She put both

her hands on his shoulders, and then dropped them. "No," she said, with a charming withdrawal, "I won't do that. Don't let me. But I am so happy!"

"Why?" His breath came chokingly. Emotion was still high in him, but its tendency had changed.

"Why, what day is it?" asked Laura, rallying him. "Does n't it mean anything to you? It's the day we're going to sell your work, to see the beginning of your future. Llandaff, I have n't told you what I think of the drawings. They're great! they're superb!" She thought she heard Brownell's step on the stair, and made her potion strong. He trembled under the impact of her presence and her praise. For though he knew the drawings were neither superb nor great, it shook him to hear her call them so.

"It is n't so much that this particular man is to buy this particular work," she hurried on to say, for now she knew Brownell was coming. "But it means the beginning of things. You never did anything before, because you were alone. We did this together, you and I. Now we shall be together" —

There was a knock at the door. Laura estimated his power of concealing emotion, and Brownell's possibility of reading it, and found them both hopeless. Llandaff looked to her as if he were going to cry. She took his hand, and gave him a little leading pull toward the back room, where the portières were drawn aside.

"Go in there and then into the hall," she whispered. "He'll come the other way. I'll bring him down in a minute."

Llandaff turned obediently, and she called, —
"Come!"

It was Brownell, but he did not enter with his accustomed deference. He was flushed with triumph, happy as a boy.

"Come here, my girl!" he called. "Give me a kiss. I've made you four thousand dollars to-day." And irrepressibly he took her in his arms and kissed her. History repeats itself childishly. They were standing in the very spot where she and Llandaff had dropped the sword. He, mute and pale, where he had turned at Brownell's voice, did not think of that. He did not think of anything.

"Sh!" said Laura in Brownell's ear, "some one is here."

Brownell, still with his arms about her, turned and saw Llandaff, ghastly, looking at them. The rich man gave a laugh.

"All in the family!" he cried jovially. "We don't mind you, Warrener. Your cousin's going to marry me, all right. You're the first to know."

Llandaff melted away from his place in the doorway. He went like a ghost, with the face of a ghost. Laura cursed her stars, and might have cursed Brownell with them, but the magic four thousand dollars sustained her. This rather obnoxious person, detaining her in his arms, was her present hold on life. Llandaff was temporarily lost, though she had little fear of the loss proving permanent. He had always seemed to her a weakling, to be led by any chain. Brownell stared after him, and then looked at her.

"Don't he like it?" he asked.

"Nobody can tell what he likes," said Laura prettily. "These artists, you know, they're all touch and go, hot and cold!"

"Don't he like me?"

"Who cares? What difference does it make? I like you. Isn't that enough? Look at my dress. I got it for you." She gently put him from her, and stood before him, spreading out her plumage.

"Did you, dear? Did you get it for me?" It touched him to the soul to be an object of solicitude to this magnificent creature, who stooped to him from some far height of grace and brilliancy.

"I did, sir," said Laura decisively, "for you alone. But we can't talk of dresses now. We must follow up my cousin. Ah, but you said" — she referred to it as if by chance, "did you say you'd made me something?"

"I did. Put it to your account. A quick turn. Might have made something for myself, but I'm tied up. Mine is coming in a lump. Four thousand, my girl! Hey?" He was approaching her, but Laura swept him a curtesy. Her face was brilliant.

"I thank you, sir," she said. "This is what it is to be in with somebody who knows the ropes. Now — my cousin! We've got to see him, we've got to see the drawings. May I bring them up here?"

"Don't trouble. Let me go down."

"No. He's very irritable to-day. I don't know why. Let me go and find out. Really, after all, you'd better give it up, and let me placate him."

"All right. I'll trot away. Come again another day."

Laura went out with him and down the stairs, chiefly to avoid the necessity of a tender good-by. But Llan-daff came to his own door, and stood there waiting. He did not regard Laura in the least, but looked at Brownell.

"Mr. Brownell," he said with a careful courtesy, "will you come in?"

"Sure!" said Brownell heartily. He felt at once that everything was smooth, so that the interview might proceed as it had promised. Llandaff's pallor and shaking hand impressed him. He had a momentary pity for the kind of man who, even though he did immortal work purely American, was so bloodless and like a woman. Llandaff led the way into the library, and Brownell followed. Laura had no lack of courage. She was only a step behind. Margaret stood by the fireplace, some bits of charred paper in her hand. She was plunged in a helpless sorrow. Tears were in her eyes. Her face was full of a most eloquent grief. She looked up quickly as they entered, and made a little gesture of appeal, meant for Brownell. It seemed to beg him not to let her husband's work prove wholly futile.

"Got 'em ready?" asked Brownell cheerfully, with his rudimentary conception of Warrener's need and his own financial power. "How d'y' do, Mrs. Warrener. Hope I see you well."

Margaret did not answer, and Llandaff, going up to her, drew out of her hands the charred strips of paper, and put them into the grate. He took the poker, and stirred them to a flame.

"There they are, Mr. Brownell," he said vacuously. "There is my work."

Brownell looked quickly from one woman to the other. Margaret's face wore a deeper grief. Laura's had on a mask. She nodded at him briefly and, he thought, confirmed his own solution.

"Oh, come now, Warrener!" he said soothingly,

"you ain't well. You lay down here. You worry Mrs. Warrener to death."

"Oh, yes!" said Llandaff smoothly, "I am quite well. Won't you be seated? Would you like to talk it over?"

Brownell, with his desire of being on the spot and helping the two women through a crisis, sat down on the edge of a straight chair, though he left them standing. Laura stood near the door, steadfastly regarding Llandaff; but he did not once look at her. She was the significant point in the room, the guest for whom this pageant was arranged; but it was as if their spiritual eyes regarded each other without need of the senses. Margaret walked round the table, and picked up a sheet that had fallen to the floor; but Llandaff saw her.

"Give it to me," he said quietly. "Bring it here."

She did so, as if she had no power of denial, and he broke the cardboard over his knee. Then he tore it with forceful fingers, and laid it on the flame. The fire leaped up and ate it. "There, Mr. Brownell," he said, "there are your designs, — Hebe, Juno, Ceres, the whole outfit. They're burned to a coal, the jades. That's the end of *them*."

"There! there!" said Brownell cheerfully. "Don't you mind." He got up, and went over to Llandaff; he laid a hand upon his arm. "Cheer up, old man!" said he. "We'll weather this."

Llandaff looked down at the hand, apparently with some curiosity, but no other interest.

"Oh, yes!" he said vaguely, "we shall weather it. We've weathered it now."

"Come now," said Brownell. "You lie down

a while and let Mrs. Warrener get you some pillows. You need a vacation."

Llandaff smiled. The vacation idea was haunting him.

"I'll tell you what," said Brownell, struck with a sudden clever notion, "you and Mrs. Warrener go down to the Matlock house, and take a rest. It's your house, you know. It's only waiting for you to buy."

"Damn the Matlock house!" said Warrener gently, but incisively.

Then Laura stepped forward, and laid her hand on Brownell's arm, with some insistence.

"Come," said she, "we must go."

He obeyed her, but with one backward look at Margaret. She gave him a confirming glance, and he allowed himself to be convoyed out of the room. Outside he hesitated, and made as if to return.

"I don't like to leave her with him," he said, frowning in his perplexity. "It don't strike me he's quite right."

"He's as right as ever he is," said Laura encouragingly. "That's genius."

"He might do her a mischief," urged Brownell, still lingering.

"Oh, no! he's far more likely to sit down and paint a picture. Trust me! He's all right."

Brownell went soberly away, forgetting to shake hands with her, and Laura listened a moment at the door and then ran upstairs. She hummed a little song, thinking of the four thousand dollars. A decided issue always made her tread the more firmly, and gave her a wider vision. Llandaff, by his lunacy,

had marked out her road. Like a bad actor, he had muddled his part, and been hissed off the stage. So he had wasted all the means he had to help her, and cast her lot in elsewhere. She dismissed him from even an idle musing. All her faculties were in train. She had no energy for woolly ponderings on what might or might not be going on within him at the moment.

But nothing was going on in Llandaff's mind. He only got the hearth-brush, and scrupulously swept up the ashes where he had scattered them. Then, without a look at Margaret, he took his hat, to go out. She was trying to keep a commonplace demeanor, where she sat, but irrepressibly she called to him, —

“Llandaff, please don't go! not for a minute!”

He laid down his hat and came back to her.

“Why?” he asked.

Her emotion was so great that she forgot herself, and was emboldened.

“I don't want to be left alone; this has upset me.”

He sat down and looked out of the window.

“My burning up those things?” he asked indifferently. “It's a good job. You ought to think so. You knew they were all fakes.”

If he had destroyed them from scorn of them, she would have been glad indeed; but she knew some other reason lay behind.

“All your work was in them,” she said passionately, “all your winter's work. And you cared so much.”

“Well,” said Llandaff, in the same even tone, “I don't care now.”

“But,” she insisted, with a futile encouragement, “you'll begin again. You'll do something else.”

"Oh, no!" said Llandaff quietly, "I never shall do anything else."

They were talking together like two creatures belonging to different planes of life, and meeting because some common topic had thrust itself upon them: not like a man and woman who had drunk for years from the same cup. Margaret felt the last pang of sacrifice, that desire for immolation of self for what is dearer than self, and the utter powerlessness of action. Expression had died within her, because they two no longer spoke in the same tongue. They had ceased to touch. Their poles did not respond. So she sat quivering with agony for him, and sending up an inarticulate prayer to something above them both, from whom it might descend in heavenly showers.

To Llandaff's apathetic mind, silence mattered no more nor less than speech. He was in the midst of a great stillness, after which he might feel something likely to be terrible. Now he felt nothing, except that he had waited long enough. It was irksome, and he spoke to her in the tone of one who has been asked to do a courtesy, and wonders if at last it might be accomplished.

"I believe I'll go out now. You don't mind?"

She was afraid for him, and again it gave her courage.

"Let me go too, Llandaff," she urged. "Please!"

"Very well," he said, with unexpected acquiescence. "Get your hat."

They started out together, and he waited for her to choose her path. She turned down the hill, and through the square, and thence up the avenue where

they had sung at Christmas time, and so on into the park. Neither of them spoke. Llandaff had quite forgotten her; but they walked evenly, as people do who have been years in accommodating their steps. The dusk fell, while they were in the park, and with it came the feathery flakes of snow, a flurry in the air. Margaret led the way over the little bridges and round the lonesome paths where the shrubbery was beginning to be feathered white. Suddenly she felt not so much her own weariness as his.

"I'm tired, Llandaff," she ventured. "You'll have to take me home."

He gave her his arm, and they turned homeward.

"I'll put you on a car," he said at length, but she rebelled, trusting in her weakness to keep him with her.

"No! I cannot unless you come. You must get me something to eat. I'm hungry."

So Llandaff took the car with her, and they dined together at a modest little restaurant down town. Afterwards he walked home beside her, and to her joy went up the stairs, and into his own room, where she heard him stepping about, in his accustomed way. Then it was still. Margaret did not sleep. She was ready to summon Brandon and send him for Doctor Milbanke if there was need. What the need might be, she did not know; yet she was afraid. But there was no sound. At eleven, she stole to his door, and opened it softly.

"What is it?" came his voice from the darkness.

"Did you call?" asked Margaret.

"No," he said, "I did n't call. Good-night."

So she left him and went back again to watch.

CHAPTER XXXV

TRANSMUTED LOVE

BUT though Margaret stayed awake that night, to keep him company, Llandaff had no need of her. Indeed, he forgot her and what she might be feeling. In the morning he came out rather earlier than usual, had his breakfast, and went down town. He seemed to be not so much suffering as incapable of speech, and so he was throughout the days that followed. What had happened to change the relation between him and Laura, Margaret could not guess; but it was changed. The two, who had spent every available minute of their time together, took separate roads. Laura went past their door without knocking, and Llandaff no longer ran up to hers, as he had a dozen times a day. He had packed up his drawing materials with a scrupulous care, as if it were a very important thing to do; but Margaret could not define the feelings with which he did it. Then, a good deal the worse for such upheavals, he settled down to his work for the "Householder" and concocted paragraphs with a blurring brain. Money was low with them, and Margaret, who kept the purse, looked forward rather tensely to the performance of the "Banished Queen," and the inadequate payment she had been promised. Necessity stared her in the face, and though Greenfield

backed and filled, and denied having any plans for the next year, she insisted over and over that he must give her something to do, as by word of mouth and through Doctor Milbanke she reiterated it to him. But her mind was distracted even from practical issues by studying Llandaff's face and wondering what it meant. She ached under such solicitude as she had never felt for him before. Since her emotional life was hidden from him, the current, dammed up in solitude, burst its banks and swept along in passionate thought. Like any woman denied the mate to whom she has grown used, she thought of love constantly, day in, day out, though now it was spiritual longing, great abnegation, and not the natural joy. She had reached a pitch of feeling not to be attained by one entirely happy; and that because no spur of self moved her desire for him.

She could count the steps by which she climbed. In the beginning, said her blood, he was hers. They had made vows, and the vows would hold. Then, when the chain snapped, she had fought for her own with the ferocity of female kind. All the centuries of primal passion were in her onslaught, as all the centuries of wandering prompted his withdrawal. The woman nature and the man's — so pathetically unlike, so inexorably bound to carry out the general scheme — these had struggled until they bled. "Let me escape!" cried the pulses of the male. "You shall never escape," answered the fierce thing set to guard the nest. But out of that conflict she had arisen, not cherishing him less, as she triumphantly knew, but not prizing herself at all. Her first renunciation had been made in the pangs of travail; nature had dragged the

living soul away from her. Now she was giving him up daily even in her thought, because God had snatched him for some unknown issue.

There is such a thing in the life of spiritual devotion as an endurance fed on sacrifice. So, when our beloved are dying, we cease to consider the weariness of our flesh; physical laws go down before the greater fiat. We wake at our post until we are no longer needed. To Margaret had come the simplest form of self-surrender. Seeing her husband dumb and senseless over Laura's loss, she was only sorry; and never could she ignore Laura's involuntary call to him. In elemental love, the childish soul, awakened first to jealousy, cries out, "You have no claim on him!" But the mind inured to pain and the ways of life humbly confesses that the interloper's mandate may be, of natural right, more strenuous than its own. It can merely, in all humbleness, help the tempted traitor in holding to his bond, unless indeed he may be released with honor; it can be quite gentle with him because he suffers to be free. This is the path of divine beauty where the stars are clearer than over the blossomy way it left. Now it can build a house eternal in the heavens. The desired one may never come to live in it; but other feet will stray thereto, and other eyes look with wonder on its austere front. "This," might the soul cry, "O beloved! is the white stone erected to what was between you and me. You have gone journeying. Your feet may never bring you this way again; but the marble walls are shining here through sacred groves. I built it out of what was ruined. Therefore, our love lives after all."

These things were the substance of Margaret's

thought, her bread of daily life. She no longer walked in an exaltation like that which attended her first withdrawal, but very soberly, as one who has things to do: to guide life which had hitherto gone like a careless river, to use every instant of the instants left. She went "softly." And she was not unhappy, though a great anxiety pulled always at her heart.

Doctor Milbanke knew how poor they were, and how innocently Margaret was going on in the hope of luck. He realized, too, how fatuously Llandaff was ignoring the thought of the future, as he always had ignored it. So he talked things over with Miss Olivia, and one late afternoon when she was likely to find Margaret alone, the old lady went over there on a prearranged errand. Margaret, sitting idle after a hard day, was delighted to see her. She untied Miss Olivia's bonnet-strings, and made her lie back in an easy-chair, while she brewed some tea. Miss Milbanke had grown appreciably older that winter, not because life was harder for her, but that she had reached one of the stations after which the face indefinitely changes into the look of another decade. She sat there smiling at Margaret, her white head resting against the cushion, and on her face the look of peace. Seeing that, Margaret's heart went suddenly out to her, in a throb of envy.

"You're tired, Miss Olivia," she said, "but you look so happy! You always do."

"I am happy, my dear," said the old lady. She lifted one of her fine hands to touch Margaret's cheek, as she took the teacup. "I have n't been unhappy for a good many years, except for other people."

"Shall we ever get over that?" asked Margaret quickly.

"I hope not, my dear,—I hope not. I expect to ache that way as long as I live. Now don't let me moralize! James says we are two tiresome old creatures, going round preaching our own gospel. When are you coming to us?"

"I did n't know I was coming." Margaret smiled at her. She knew she was neither going there nor anywhere out of her beaten track.

"Yes. James and I got it all arranged last night. We want young company. We want you to give up this place, and move over to us. You will be quite free. Llandaff can do his work and you shall do yours. If we meet at dinner, I may think myself very lucky, that's all."

"Oh, how good you are!" cried Margaret remorsefully, remembering that she had forgotten her this winter in strenuous living. "If Llandaff would, I'd do it with such pleasure! but I don't know,—I doubt it."

At that moment he came. Miss Milbanke was taken by surprise; his wretched bearing threw her off her guard. She beckoned him nearer.

"You poor laddie, you!" she said. "You're worn out."

Llandaff smiled at her absently, as he took her hand. He liked her with the quietude belonging to old custom, but at that moment he wished her away. He was deadly tired. His face had the dulled, drawn look of the creature urged too far. He would have thought himself a tragic figure, save that now he had scarcely the wits to think at all.

"I am rather fagged," he said incidentally. "I don't care much for the job I'm doing. It eats into me, in a way."

"You must n't work too hard."

"Oh, no!" returned Llandaff, with the cheerful meaning, "Kindly let me alone. Take your feet off my preserves."

"Now, Margaret," said Miss Olivia, "we'll submit the case to him." Then she presented it as she had before, putting it on the ground of their needing company, she and the doctor, in their old age. But Llandaff paid scarcely a civil attention to her.

"I could n't, thank you, Miss Milbanke," he said briefly. "My work won't let me. I may go away later, but not now."

The little things never cease to hurt. Margaret, bending over the teacups, felt her face crimson; she wondered whether the fashion he had lately of ignoring her seemed as hideously significant to other people as it did to her.

"Well! well!" said Miss Milbanke, "I won't urge you. But I hope James will manage it."

Presently she went away, and Margaret came back, after bidding her good-by, to find Llandaff lying in a chair, his face thrown upward in an attitude of great weariness. The firmness of his flesh had yielded, the skin had sunken into lines. They were not noble tracteries, for they came only from the flaccidity of flesh. He looked middle-aged. As she moved about, setting her tea-table back, he opened his eyes and watched her. The perverseness of nervous tension moved him to irresponsible speech, and he flamed out, not choosing what he should say, —

"We're in a damnable fix, are n't we?"

She sat down opposite him.

"How?" she asked.

"Stranded. No money, and — I ought to have provided for you, Margaret. I ought to have provided."

Her heart beat quicker at even that thought of her, but she spoke in haste.

"We're going to have money. The Minervas" —

He pushed the argument aside, with a gesture of denial.

"That's very little. And it's for you. It won't even last you till the autumn."

"I wonder if I could go into vaudeville!" said Margaret, smiling. "That would take me through the summer swimmingly. O Llandaff! don't you worry. I've got fighting blood. It comes up in my throat when I think I can help. We'll pull through yet."

"The trouble is, I ought never to have married you." He spoke broodingly, with no eye to the effect on her. To her inflamed consciousness the words meant more than he intended.

"I'm sorry, Landaff," she said, — "I'm sorry."

"So am I sorry, but that won't make it right. You are going to be poor." He fell into musing. She could not bear to leave him groping there, and yet she feared to speak.

"Don't be sorry, Llandaff," she said timidly. "Please don't."

"I am sorry," he burst forth impetuously. "I am sorry. I never did a thing in my life that did n't fall through. It's been a beastly failure. I don't know why."

Margaret leaned forward toward him, and spoke rapidly.

"Llandaff, listen to me. Let me say it. There is nothing in the world that would tempt me to give up my old life with you. I had to have it. It belonged to me. I've got to tell you this. All the things are true that I used to say to you. To swear I love you is too little. It is n't love: it's a nearer thing. You're a part of me. You are knit into my life. If I could take care of you like a child, do things for your sake when you are away from me, — that is all the happiness I need. Do you think I want pay? If it suits you to be alone, then that is my happiness, too." She spoke with an intensity foreign to his present idea of her, yet there was no passion in her voice. She wanted to convince, not to offend him. Her mind was pervaded by the certainty that he needed some human being; if it were not she, it might well be another. He could not have the other; and for that cause he must be reminded that there were ministrations less desired, but ever at his hand.

He sat looking straight before him, and she could hardly tell whether he heard or not.

"Strange!" he muttered at last, "strange!"

There were many things she had to say, after these weeks of repression.

"I have been exacting, I've been cruel," she owned. "I should have looked with your eyes, and seen how things appeared to you. I did n't at first. I want to, now. I loved you, but I failed in love."

He looked at her, and his face softened.

"Did you, poor child?" he said. "Well! I failed in everything."

She wanted to throw herself beside him, and touch his hand with hers. She had loved his hands, but for a long time she had not glanced their way. Now they called her. He caught the look in her eyes, and she felt his counter-withdrawal.

"Margaret," he said desperately, "I can't be sure of being good to you. You are so intense!"

She laughed almost lightheartedly. "Yes, I am intense," she repeated, "I am intense. But I don't believe that will trouble you. Why, Llandaff! we're old people, mulling things over by the fire. I don't want to be more than the friend you'd call on, if you needed anything. We're only talking now, to talk it out. After that, I only want to mix your grog and say 'Hullo!' when you come in from work."

Her trickery depressed him. He could not reconcile it with any possibility of her understanding how changed he had become. He fancied she thought he had returned to her the man he was.

"You don't understand, Margaret," he said miserably. "All the things you blamed me for last winter were true. They are true now. I did what you accused me of doing. I wanted her. I asked her to go away with me. If she had kept her word, I might not even be here telling you. But she deceived me." So pitifully weak had he become that his voice died, and he looked at her imploringly as if he made confidence of a common loss, and begged for sympathy. The old rage of jealous blood rose and choked her; but she put it down.

"You need n't tell me, Llandaff," she said. "That can't alter things between you and me. It seems to me very simple. If you want to get away from me

and be free, you shall do it. But while we are bound to each other, we must not do wrong. You must keep your word to me. I must help you keep it."

For the first time in many weeks, he looked at her with the eyes of the mind, thinking of her and what she said, and not of his own impoverishment. "You are a strange woman," he broke forth. "I never knew you were this kind of woman."

"I don't know what kind of woman I am," said Margaret, pitying herself a little because she found it so thankless to do well. "But I can't stop loving you because you stop loving me. No! no! not that. I don't want to go back. I could n't. It's a different kind of thing now. Only there's just as much of it—more. And if you are in trouble because you need to get away from me, why, I'm bound to see you through it, that's all."

It seemed to her a very meagre summary of what had cost her blood to learn; but Llandaff sat and mused upon it, though he could not speak.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FOOL AND HIS FOLLY

AT this present stage of her fortunes Laura thought nothing about Warrener. He represented a lost issue, and she was absorbed by more immediate affairs. Some time she might go back to the scene before Brownell and meditate upon it, but it never would mean anything very tragic to her. She had that kind of understanding which sees clearly what it sees. A fact, to her intelligence, was but a fact ; and she knew how to pair it with its fellows and judge from an accumulated experience what the result must be. Laura generalized a great deal in an elementary way. She cast mental horoscopes, and reasoned that men of certain types could perform certain acts, and those acts only ; and thus, weighing the effect of forces, she never guessed their real significance.

Emotions were the means to some practical end ; and knowing to a hair her own capacity for evoking them, she knew nothing further. So might one, possessed of the formula, call up spirits and fail to read their message. It took very little outlay on her own part to awaken an extravagance of feeling in others ; why should the feeling cost them more than the effort cost her ? Such ravaging results were incredible. She could only wonder a little over them, when there was

time. Llandaff's jealous rage seemed as concrete as a cold in the head. He would recover, unless, indeed, there were complications, as in the case of certain poetic heroes. There was no call for extraordinary remedies. If she needed him at any time, she could get him. But at this moment she did not need him; she needed other things instead. The market was boiling, and every bubble held a dollar for her. And while it seethed with plenty, one morning she went down town and saw on the bulletins "Death of Simeon Hooker." He was one of Brownell's favoring gods; and he alone of all that crowd might be half trusted to hold up "Hesperides." Nobody could tell what his death might do for it.

She telephoned her brokers to sell every share standing in her name, and then went on to the office Brownell had taken since he grew into the habit of hobnobbing with the great. It was at the top of a dizzy building, with a park below in a bed of bare branches, soon to be a foam of green. True to the habits of his later life, he had furnished the room in some magnificence. Wherever he went, he carried the hall mark of his wealth in wood and leather, and paintings that seldom seemed to him done carefully enough to justify the money they had cost. As Laura went in, she involuntarily sniffed for the orris and patchouli of which his carriage reeked. The very thought of him sometimes brought them to her recoiling sense.

She knew how she must find him. He would be excited by something of the same foreboding which had prompted her to come. But he sat at his desk enveloped in cheerfulness, and writing a letter. He wore very fresh clothes, and a flower in his button-hole.

"Hullo! hullo!" he cried, throwing down his pen and advancing to meet her. "Well, if this ain't an unexpected pleasure!"

He pulled forward a chair, but she put her hand on the back of it, and stood facing him.

"No," she said. "I can't stay. Have you seen the bulletins? Do you know Sim Hooker is dead?"

"Yes," said Brownell easily, "yes. Saw it this morning. Sad, very sad! You know him?"

She looked at him in amazement. His eyes were as clear, his cheeks as healthily colored as those of a child who expects his bowl of bread and milk to be ever before him. And yet, as she knew, his whole fortune was mortgaged to chance. Then his unfinished letter took her eye, and even in that hint of action she saw some hope. To her mind, he was fumbling enough to depend on paper and ink when wires were ready to flash his message.

"What are you writing?" she asked imperiously. Tactful subtlety was too fine a weapon for this warfare. It needed the broadsword.

"Why," said he cheerfully, "I'm writing to Claribel."

Laura stared at him.

"Is it possible," she asked rapidly, — "possible you don't know what Hooker's death means?"

"It is very sad, of course," replied Brownell with decorum, "very sad for his family. Sad for us, too, associates in business! I never cared much about him myself; but good man, I dare say, good man! very able!"

"It's enough to knock this crazy market all to pieces. The rest of that crowd have more brains, but

they 've less money and no scruples. I would n't have trusted him farther than I could see him. I don't trust them one inch. They 'll down you."

He admired her emotion, the grasp of affairs quite beyond, he believed, any feminine capacity, the hot speech all in his favor.

"You 're a good girl," he said, with a patronage that maddened her. "I don't forget how much you 've bothered over my affairs. I don't forget it, dear."

It was past ten o'clock. The market had opened. Her inflamed imagination brought her the clangor of voices all clamoring to sell. The wave of panic crept nearer, and washed to her feet. A money craze was the only thing that ever touched her brain, and taught her what it might be to feel the nerves collapse under some hideous mastery. As she had told Brownell, she had herself passed through panic and loss. Sometimes in her dreams she heard still the cries of the men who had juggled with her fate, as she heard them one day from the gallery. She never forgot the unreasoning rage besetting her that day, nor her hatred of the men who bought and sold. They were wasting what was hers, and she could in turn have destroyed them, loathing them the more because it was their own game they played, regardless of her. She had pushed her way into their playground, and put on her stakes, — but it was their game. She had no rights in it.

The supremacy given by money was the only sort she coveted, and to-day she was athirst for it. Other women might haggle over their lovers and their visiting lists. She wanted the power of wealth.

"It is ten o'clock," she said, her voice trembling a little, as if she named the hour of death.

more, to-day. Now 's the time. 'Buy on recessions,' you know!"

He used the commonplace jauntily, as if he had discovered it. Thus do they speak who hearten the world with axioms, and to whose childlike intelligence such saws are ever new. Laura turned slowly away, her eyes still thoughtful, but not now for him; his folly was detaching his fate from hers, inch by inch. Whatever fortune came to her, it began to seem as if it could not flow through any channel leading to them both. At the door, a new doubt assailed her, and she stopped. Her voice was only serious now, devoid of persuasion.

"Are you holding anything besides 'Hesperides'?"

His face betrayed him. He flushed guiltily. There had been a tacit confidence between them, but he had overstepped it, and with his new arrogance bought right and left, in spite of her.

"You have done it!" she cried sharply. Her face fell into lines of endurance. Her eyes brooded, as he thought meltingly, over his uneasy prospects, but really because she was giving him up. The fool must be left to his folly.

"Yes," he said. "I've bought a good deal, all told."

"What?"

He rehearsed the list.

"Cheap coppers," she commented. "Cats and dogs!" The exigency was great, and she grew calm. "Did they advise you?"

"Who?"

"The Hookers, and their crowd?"

"No, dear, no!" He answered eagerly, glad to

it before? We're always coming in contact with that, we business men."

She could have groaned, save that unproductive emotion was not in her way.

"Call them up," she said. "Ask where 'Hesperides' opened."

He went to the telephone with alacrity, dreading nothing. But his face had changed a little when he reported the answer.

"It's down — nine points."

"You see!" she cried. "You see!" Arguments were mustering on her side. "Now will you believe?"

A wrinkle came between his eyes, but still he smiled at her, reassuring her as in duty bound.

"It will recover," he said. "You'll be the one to see."

"Will you ring them up again, and tell them to sell you out?"

"Now, child? Why, it's down! Do you know what I should lose?"

"Would you rather lose that, or all you've got?"

He stepped nearer, and patted her cheek.

"Bless you, dear," he said, "you're tired out. You're as nervous as a witch. Take a day off. You go home, and let me send the carriage round after you. Have a little ride, and enjoy yourself."

The inexorable senses wafted her the smell of patchouli. The fall of kingdoms could be more easily borne than that carriage. She waved his word aside, and asked him sharply, —

"Are you holding anything for me?"

"Not a share. I closed your account yesterday, when you told me to. I'll buy you a little something

more, to-day. Now 's the time. 'Buy on recessions,' you know!"

He used the commonplace jauntily, as if he had discovered it. Thus do they speak who hearten the world with axioms, and to whose childlike intelligence such saws are ever new. Laura turned slowly away, her eyes still thoughtful, but not now for him; his folly was detaching his fate from hers, inch by inch. Whatever fortune came to her, it began to seem as if it could not flow through any channel leading to them both. At the door, a new doubt assailed her, and she stopped. Her voice was only serious now, devoid of persuasion.

"Are you holding anything besides 'Hesperides'?"

His face betrayed him. He flushed guiltily. There had been a tacit confidence between them, but he had overstepped it, and with his new arrogance bought right and left, in spite of her.

"You have done it!" she cried sharply. Her face fell into lines of endurance. Her eyes brooded, as he thought meltingly, over his uneasy prospects, but really because she was giving him up. The fool must be left to his folly.

"Yes," he said. "I've bought a good deal, all told."

"What?"

He rehearsed the list.

"Cheap coppers," she commented. "Cats and dogs!" The exigency was great, and she grew calm. "Did they advise you?"

"Who?"

"The Hookers, and their crowd?"

"No, dear, no!" He answered eagerly, glad to

reassure her that the doubtful Hookers had no finger here. "I used my judgment."

"You used your judgment," she repeated, with a slowness bearing the weight of irony. "Well!" She mused a moment, and then turned upon him a rather sickly counterfeit of the coquetry he had found so moving. "Suppose I make it a condition? Suppose I say sell or — sell me? Give me up!"

Brownell looked her in the face. The sincerity of his glance impressed her, because it meant a certain kind of power. It was not a sort that would be likely to serve him in the world, but still it was power. Obstinacy was there, too, — the unyielding will of the man sure he is right. He broke into a laugh.

"You would n't say that, dear," he avowed. "You're fooling. You've got some liking for me, and it's for the old man himself, — not for his money. But, tell you what! I don't want to make you nervous. I'll run round there and talk it over."

He got his hat and went down in the elevator with her. He would have walked scrupulously by her to the "Telephone" office, but she urged him away.

"Go!" she cried. "Don't let them persuade you. Sell! or sell a part and average. You're loaded to the brim." Once, when she turned back, it was some little comfort to see his shoulders pushing through the crowd. They wore an air of determination, yet she had a certainty that his fate was upon him and that it was too late for him to be saved. She called herself slothful for not having moved him to some purpose and long before this gathered a part of his fortune into her greedy hand.

But the market did not break. "Hesperides" went

down ten points, and then recovered two. Laura watched it all day, and at nightfall breathed a little easier. If the drop was only from Hooker's death, that wave had spent its force. The fool had still a chance. He came to see her in the evening, radiant.

"There," said he, "what did I tell you? They're more scared than hurt, the whole of 'em. If I'd sold out — well, by George! I don't dare to put down on paper where I should be now."

He was as gay as a criminal reprieved, and her own spirits took a reactionary drop. Her day had been hard, in many ways; it had left her dead tired, and ugly to look upon. There were black circles under her eyes, and languor pervaded her.

"The danger is n't over," she said sombrely. "You are on thin ice. No, it's not thin; it's honeycombed under you. It's rotting. It will break up, and what becomes of you then?"

"Well! well! we'll talk about it later." He rose to go, with an eye single to her weariness. Every generous fibre in him thrilled at this spectacle of a woman so overwrought in fighting the world. That chivalrous pity had been very keen in him for the last weeks, though he assuaged it by remembering that her trials were but temporary. Soon she would drive in her carriage, and "sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam." He never guessed that the seams she longed for traversed the patchwork of life, and that in the midst of plenty she would uproot the roses of her Eden to make a market-place. "We'll see about it," he added, with renewed access of kindness. "Don't you worry."

Then he went away, and Laura sat for a time resting, but too tired to keep her mind from a dull and sagging round. She blamed herself, as another sort of creature repents of sins, and because, with this one innocuous person, she had failed to play her part. He was hers ; that she knew. All that he had was hers, and yet she had never taken the tide at flood. He was very simple ; but his single-mindedness had all the effect of subtlety. The thought of her futile striving wearied her anew ; and with the soldierly obedience of the true laborer, she got up, dressed, and went away to the theatre.

Doctor Milbanke walked down the stairs with her. He spoke briefly, and was hurrying on, when a thought arrested him.

"Warrener is ill," he said, regarding her sharply. "Did you know that?"

He had watched the welding of the tie between them, and now he saw, with an equal certainty, that it was broken.

"No," said Laura sympathetically, "I did n't know it. Anything serious? Oh, no! doctors don't like to be asked that."

They had reached the lower hall, and the light there struck upon her face and showed its weariness. He disliked her frankly, but her physical need appealed to him, the more, perhaps, in that it mirrored Warrener's. He had her classified as a mischief-maker ; but now, for an instant, he wondered if she, too, could suffer.

"You are tired," he said kindly. "Let me take you somewhere. I have a carriage here."

Laura assented warmly. She never ignored a favor

likely to bring her into closer relations with human beings, preferably men who might be of use to her.

"Yes," said the doctor, as they drove away, "Warrener's in a bad state."

"Anything serious?" she asked again.

The gravity of the case he did not propose to touch on, but he could hint at facts concerning her alone. If Llandaff were overwrought, discouraged, she had a hand in it.

"Oh, he's run down!" said the doctor, "at the end of his rope. He ought to go away."

It seemed to Laura that she also was at the end of her rope, and she grew breathless as the thought of Brownell recurred to her, of him and the madness he might work to-morrow. Her mind slipped away from her in a fashion quite foreign to its usually orderly habit, and drifted. Suddenly she recalled herself, and turned, to find the doctor looking at her keenly. She laughed and spoke out, the more frankly in that candor was her only ground with him.

"Doctor, you don't like me!"

He continued looking at her, as if she were some article to be appraised.

"You don't like me the least little bit," she went on. "Own it now! Tell the truth!"

"No," said the doctor, "I don't care about you."

"Why don't you?"

"Oh, what's that overworked Italian word, — *simpatica*? We're not that. Temperaments have got to coincide. Slip a cog, and they jar."

"But why are n't we sympathetic?"

"We're antipathies, — cat and dog, snake and woman."

"You don't like what I do!"

"I like your morning column in the 'Telephone.' You're a very knowing lady."

"I mean you don't like my doing it. You don't find me feminine."

"I find you clever. There's no sex in brain."

"I don't belong to the home! I've no conventional graces!"

"You have manifold graces, but you'll never use them up in the home."

"Where shall I use them?"

"In the world of trade. They'll be thriftily sold."

"By the powers!" said Laura, laughing roundly. "I like this. Where did you find it out?" Her color had come back at the touch of mental life. She felt the impulse of a mind matching hers in vibration, and prized it the more for her soreness over Brownell's vacuity.

"I study men and women in a small way," said the doctor, unmoved. "You interest me. I've seen your type before, but never so developed."

"What am I?" she challenged him. "What is my type?"

"You are a curious compound of sexual differences. That means power, of a certain sort. Your personal magnetism is tremendous. Your brain is big enough to estimate and use it. But that magnetism has no particular value to you except as force. It has no sacredness whatever. You have accepted it as something God Almighty gave you to earn your bread with, as he gave the tigress claws, to clutch. You simulate emotions you don't in the least feel, except in an elementary way. You are a merchant trading in charms."

She was alive with interest. That enormous egotism of hers arose, and enveloped them both like some compelling force.

"Well!" she said breathlessly, "Well! Shall I succeed? Shall I have my way?"

"I don't think you'll have your way for very long at a time," said the doctor imperturbably. "You'll seem to have it, but you must remember the universe is built on honor. The foundations were laid very deep and strong before you and I were born. It won't do the least good for us to tinker up little laws of our own. They'll only get smashed, and we with them. There! I've told your fortune. Blackfriars Theatre? Here we are."

He got out, and ceremoniously said good-by. Laura went in rather gravely. She felt as if she might like to think her fortune over a little.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN ACCUSATION

LLANDAFF turned sulky when Doctor Milbanke asked about symptoms, and would only say, in general terms, that he was "not feeling fit."

"I'm played out," he owned, "tired, sick of the whole business." But this was followed by the assertion, savagely made, that he should be better to-morrow. He did his newspaper work in the shortest possible time, and then stayed much by himself, in an apprehensive quietude. It was mildly surprising to him that he did not try to see Laura, and that he had no desire to catch at any possible chance of explanations. But there was no chance. Internal evidence told him that. Never for a moment did he suspect her of loving Brownell; but he accepted without questioning the certainty that she had given the man rights over her. That meant that she had given them for a price. But though he would not put out his hand to detain her, as she passed his door, he wanted her with a keenness which only the sick may know. The man who tramps away his megrims in the open air does not understand. It is the creature who is tied to a lassitude he hates, who feels himself beginning to change into another kind of being foreign to all his former ways—he it is who comprehends the

deadly longing for what, though for a moment only, gives him the breath of life.

Since he had parted from her, she was more than ever the earth, — the warm, sensuous earth. His lost well-being seemed to live in her, and he forgot that all his old enjoyment of her came before he was so broken. And he told himself that, in demanding her, he did not ask more than should belong to any man by right, — something wholesome, sound, unquestioning, a woman who would hold the cup to his lips without asking whether the draught would slay, or whether he had any right to drink at all.

Of Margaret he thought sometimes with that reverence we give to creatures who live on spiritual heights where we have no desire to climb. Her avowal to him, the clarity of her devotion as she expressed it, seemed to bind him to new loyalty; and over this he felt some wonder, as if he beheld in action a virtue he had read of in books and seen upon the stage. Yet even his interest was numb within him. The great emotions of life were personified before him, and he could not care. All this puzzled him, and Margaret herself was puzzling. She was good, she was faithful, as sweet as any woman born; but her appeal to him was less than a memory out of some dead dream. They were at ease with one another now, and talked together of the affairs of daily life; but he found his mind reaching out and grasping for something she could not give, and returning, its tentacles bruised and hurt.

There was one night when a bitter mood came upon him. They had all gone out; he heard them hurrying past his door. Even Margaret had been summoned to practice the minuet for the "Banished Queen." He

envied them bitterly. They were overworked, "tired as dogs," Brandon had said, only the moment before; but they were alive. Their feet were on the earth, and, being there, they could dominate it. "Give me back my life!" he could have cried. "Give me back my body!"

Then Doctor Milbanke came, and Llandaff was mildly glad to see him. He had got to the point now where he abominated his own thoughts. They were an unruly brood. Never used to reflection in his normal moments, ideas would not come marshaling at call, but made onslaughts upon him. He did not know what to do with them.

The doctor took up his position at the window, and Llandaff lay with his eyes closed. The day had been warm, like April. This was a quiet quarter, but now a procession of boys, heralded by drums and horns, swarmed through from Benedict Square and climbed the hill. Llandaff moved irritably on his couch, and scowled.

"That's a foretaste of summer," said the doctor. "You must get away."

"Doctor," began Llandaff irrelevantly, "you might as well tell me the truth. I'm done for. You know that, don't you?"

"I know you're doing for yourself by overwork. Medicine won't help you. Common sense will."

The sick man's scars seemed to burn hotly, because he so abhorred them. He laid his hand upon them.

"I've got to die — hideously," he repeated.

The doctor had temporized with him to no purpose. He spoke sharply.

"We've all got to die. The only thing to do is to die like a man."

Llandaff felt a sudden desire to unburden himself.

"You don't think there's much of that left in me," he said recklessly. "You know I've treated Margaret like a dog."

Doctor Milbanke did know it, but compassion was strong in him and overrode all minor protests.

"Warrener," he said, with a whimsical good-humor, "I don't believe I blame anybody for anything. I get thundering mad with them. I've done that with you; but I don't wear a wig and sit on a woolsack. No man can live to my time of life without giving up the judicial habit. If we get any sense kicked into us at all, we see people have done as well as they could, poor devils!"

Llandaff sat up, and leaned his head against the wall. He was haggard, distraught, but he fixed his eyes on the doctor, with the obstinacy born out of physical weakness.

"You won't talk to me as you would to a well man," he said. "I threw Margaret over. She is a saint. But I did n't want a saint."

"No; we don't always want saints."

"In the beginning," said Warrener, as if his mind went back a long way, "I made a great many protestations. I made them to Margaret. I thought she was the only woman in the world. Then I forgot about her. I did. I forgot all about her. Was I to blame?"

"I don't know who is to blame. I know you have been on a down grade for months. Your impulses are not to be trusted. You can't depend on them. I don't say you would n't have played the devil if you had been perfectly well. Only, we can't reason from

the same premises. We must be gentle with you. You must be gentle with yourself."

"Shall I get well?" asked Llandaff suddenly.

"Not so well as you were before. You'll have to be careful."

"It is hideous! hideous!" said the sick man. "Shall I suffer much?" He seemed to be walking, step by step, into hysteria.

The doctor spoke warmly.

"Warrener, it's inhuman to sit here, moderately sound, as I am, and lecture you, when you're down on your luck; but you take my word for it! You are not going to die yet, and you are not going to die hideously. Science can prevent that every time. Death is as commonplace as breathing. The ones to be torn are those who look on. If you die, Margaret will be the one to suffer, not you."

"Margaret!" he repeated. "Margaret!" Then, after a pause, "Is n't it strange that she saved something out of the wreck? I spoiled her life, but she's a better woman for it. And I've gone under."

The doctor spoke musingly. "There is something we call the soul. The thing exists. It perceives. It has data of its own, quite unlike the data of the senses. Margaret has somehow got her soul into working order. I am inclined to think she did it through a superhuman love for you. And it's an abominable paradox that she's ten times the woman she would have been if you had n't broken her heart."

"Broken her heart!" echoed Llandaff, in a startled way. "Broken her heart!" It sounded different out of the mouth of man from what it did in his own bitter consciousness.

"It is a phrase," said the doctor calmly, "but it means something. And there are remedies. We can tear people to pieces; we can destroy the seat of reason. But if that thing we call the soul is strong enough, she finds out healing herbs, and uses them. She conquers."

"But I am not the same man I was years ago," cried Llandaff, in a fierce defense. "I made promises I could n't keep."

"Yes, we do that. Margaret did it. She promised to love and honor you. If she stopped honoring you, she kept on loving. Not in the same way, mind! She simply made her choice, and preferred you to herself. Don't you suppose fancy, hot blood, the desire of the eyes, can be killed out of a woman? Yet she goes on with this dog-trot of devotion. It's the only kind she can give, but she gives it. That's love."

"Poor girl!" said Llandaff, "poor girl!" He sank into musing, and the doctor, who had one more thing left to say, resolved to venture it.

"It's a miserable situation, but Margaret's on top of it. As for you, you've got to get on your feet and fulfill your contract to her. It's a hard saying, but you know it does n't in the least matter what you want or what I want. We pledge ourselves to certain things. We've got to cash those notes."

The door opened and Margaret herself came in, with Brandon and Willie in eager conclave. They made a stir and brought a hint of the outer world.

"I have yielded to the devil," said Brandon, "and put another dance into the play. They're insatiable, those amateurs."

"You can't have too much dancing," said Willie, in his tone of wisdom.

"Indeed you can!" Brandon contradicted him. "You can break your play in the middle, to please Terpsichore. Besides, most dances are too long."

"That's true," said Margaret, who had taken off her hat and seated herself, always at ease when the doctor was there. "Cut a dance in two, leave out half, and you get an effect. Keep repeating, repeating, and the thing is dead."

Llandaff looked at her so persistently that she turned to him and waited, thinking he would speak. But the doctor's voice was echoing over and over to his mind, in that one phrase, "You broke her heart." It seemed like an accusation of murder; yet here she was, living in spite of him, and by a strength he could not understand.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE

IT is a curious thing for a man past middle life to come suddenly into agreement with the world which has disparaged him. That happened to St. John. He had never considered himself very much of a fellow, but he had assumed that, in the plain questions likely to be set before him, he should be able, through tradition, at least, to win out decently. But at this point, he sat down and faced the fact that he was in a slough where no man of honor was likely to find himself, and he saw no way out of it. Curiously enough, it made him scrupulous toward Olga, whom he wished never to see again. He had wronged her, but he saw no possibility of not wronging her, in some fashion, whatever he did. Still, with a hopeless desire to make no more failures, he went to see her, and paid dreary visits, answering in dry commonplaces while she talked. He puzzled her; but with the simplicity of a concrete nature, she guessed at the root of his trouble and called it money. It did not seem to her that old Tom, at his age, was likely to be thinking very seriously of another woman, though his face had altered so at sight of one. And all the time the unwilling self in him kept beating to the tune, "I wish I could get rid of you!" She looked to him so famil-

iar, from the effect of old association, that he did think of her as a part of his own outer life. Yet she was quite foreign to everything he really hoped for, and he knew he had done with her.

One day, in his trouble, he went to Margaret, and sat down doggedly before her. He was like a dumb thing which needs help, and can neither specify it nor beg for it.

"Have you heard from her?" he asked.

"Teresa? No, not again." St. John sat looking at her blankly, and Margaret, wanting to reach him, saw no way. "You won't go down a second time?" she said gently.

"I don't know what I shall do," he answered, with some brusqueness. "What shall I do?"

The last words held the appeal of a nature perhaps not weaker than hers, but feeling itself to be so. Neither of them reflected that he had never told her his trouble in words; but she answered him as if he had.

"We must be honest. We can do that at least."

"What is honest? To go round smashing things because we've got tired of them?"

"We must be honest," she repeated. "We can't pretend. It never does any good."

He got up and went away, confident that he knew what she meant, and feeling, too, that she scarcely saw what honesty would make of him. If it implied the harder path, that would be one thing; but it promised all he longed for in the world. Presently he set out aimlessly for a walk, and his feet led him, in spite of himself, to Olga. His mind had cleared. He knew what he was to do. That it was what he wanted, only

made his shame and punishment the greater. In his love for Teresa, he began to see that the feeling is sacramental, compelling. Having known it, he could not go on prostituting himself to an unreal bond. He might not have Teresa, but at least he would not bind himself to the woman he repudiated, though all the inherited honor of man might bid him.

Olga was always at liberty while her ancient charge was driving, and presently he found himself sitting opposite her in the Gilroys' drawing-room. And then, in the familiar commonplace of her presence, it seemed incredible to have resolved upon any sort of ideal renunciation before a creature who was so truly a matter of fact. But Olga had been watching him.

"Tom," she said, "what's the matter? Out with it. What ails you?"

He looked at her quickly, recalled. For the moment he had forgotten her, save as a factor in great decisions.

"I don't know," he said. And he did not know. He had not behaved well, but what phase of his conduct was troubling him at that instant, it was difficult for him to specify.

"Is it money, Tom?" Her tone was sympathetic and womanly. It held the comforting strain of the friend and perhaps the wife.

"No! no!" he answered. "Do you want some?"

She shook her head.

"Tom," she went on, "I'm going to catechise you. I've found out something. You don't like me now, do you?"

"I like you very much," said St. John, with the air of one who has made a bargain and feels bound to

swear by it. "After people have known each other as long as we have, they can't say things. Words don't mean the same." He was conscious of a dull mental query whether that was a lie. It satisfied a kind of candor, and yet she was going to find in it some consoling balm. But she was cleverer than he thought, less willing to deceive herself.

"I wonder!" said she, watching him. "I wonder! Tom, you won't talk to me. You hate to snub a woman, don't you? You could n't tell the truth — if it hurt — to save your life. Now could you?"

He felt the horrible degradation of it all, because, having known Teresa, he kept referring everything in life to what she would think or say. Her unspoiled vision could not recognize cowardice or expediency, even to save a hurt. He had a weary sense that she could be honest and loving, too; but as for him, he might not attain unto it.

"No, Olga," he said hopelessly, "I don't suppose I do tell the truth."

"You could n't tell the truth to *me*. If you were dead tired of me, you would n't say so. Tom, you make an awful lot of mischief, you fellows that can't commit a murder."

St. John got up to go. That was his exasperating habit. He would neither disclose himself, nor would he stay after she seemed to herself to be getting inside his skin.

"Tom," she said, "some time you'll drive me to drink. You sit there looking volumes, and it does n't mean a thing. You remember that girl at Spa who told me you had a romance in your face, or a history, or something? Well, you have. I've heard

other people say so, but there is n't a human being alive that can get a word of it."

St. John stood waiting for the cessation of an unusual outburst.

"I don't believe there's much to get at, Olga. I'm a stupid fellow," he said. He had awakened to the general tawdriness of life, as he seemed to manage it. It occurred to him that perhaps it was so for everybody, save the very young. That would account for Teresa, and her atmosphere of a better world. Yet Teresa was different.

Olga had risen, and was acquiescing in his departure.

"I'm tired of being here," she said, as she had said it to him before. "I don't believe it will last long. Sometimes I think I'll come down to your house and take lodging. Miss Neale says there's a vacancy — the little singer's loft."

"No!" cried St. John violently. "No! You can't do that. She may come back." He felt as if somebody were depriving the Child of her only home. She might not want to return, yet nobody should cut the ground from under her feet; and the little still spot was sacred to her. "No!" he said again stridently.

Olga flashed him a look, and caught one in answer, the lantern on his hiding soul. She saw him as he had been years and years ago, when it was natural for him to disclose emotions, the emotions of a young man swayed easily by simple joys and griefs.

"Ah!" said she, "that's it, then. So it's a woman, Tom?"

St. John breathed hard. He met her eyes, but he did not answer.

"You are in love with her?" said Olga, half asserting, half questioning. "I thought so for a minute, before. Then I gave it up."

St. John spoke gently.

"Olga, I don't believe we'd better go on."

"You are in love with her," she repeated, with a confirmed boldness. "Well, that's a new thing for you, is n't it?" Her mind flashed back over the years. Of all the things likely to happen, it had never occurred to her that old Tom would fail. She had put him aside whenever it served, not her convenience, but her brother's; yet he certainly belonged to her. Her mouth quivered a little at the corners. The blow stabbed some old beliefs, and it made her think. "Tom," she said, with a child's desire to be reassured, "you always did care about me, up to now? There's been nobody else?"

He took her hand.

"No, Olga, no," he said reassuringly, "there never was anybody else."

"And now there's this girl. Well, Tom, well!" She drew her hand away, and thought. "Wait a bit," she said. "Let's finish it up now. It'll be easier than beginning again." She sat down on a sofa, and St. John left his chair and took a place beside her. He could not think she needed comforting; but there was a kind of appeal in her manner, and it moved him. Olga looked at him almost humorously. She was essentially a serious creature who laughed to show her teeth. But everything that was womanly in her came to life, and bade her assume a smile. There were tears in her eyes. She had the charm of a power repressed.

"Well, Tom," she went on, "I'm the one to say it, I suppose."

"Say what, Olga?"

"Good-by, and wish you joy!"

A great relief leaped up in him, and moved his face.

"I don't ask you to say that, Olga," he protested.

"But, dear old boy, you like her! You don't like me. What are you going to do?"

He got up under the stress of an irrepressible emotion.

"I shall do the best I can," he said. "We must all do the best we can."

"But you want her? You want to marry her?"

He made no answer, and she watched his face.

"I see," she said gently. "Bless you, Tom! Do you suppose I'd let you be a prisoner for life? You ought to have told me, you know. It was n't fair. But now I've found out — why, Tom, I'd like you to get what you want." She looked very womanly, very sweet, — young, too, her face softened by an unwonted feeling. He was nearer loving her than he had been for years. A great gratitude choked him, but he could only say blunderingly, —

"You're a good woman, Olga. But I'm not worth it."

"Oh, come! yes, you are," said Olga, rising, and giving his arm a little maternal tap. "You're a dear old boy. She ought to be glad to get you. Go away now. Go and tell her. But then I suppose you have told her?"

"I have n't told her this. She does know I care about her, Olga. I could n't help that." He was going on perhaps, in his honest absorption, to rehearse the story, but that she could not have.

"Run along," she said. "Go and tell her all about it. Tell her you're free as air. Say you jilted me, if you wish. She may like you the better. I should n't — but you can't be sure."

St. John took her hand with a grave courtesy.

"When may I come again?" he asked.

She lifted her brows.

"Again?" she inquired. "She won't let you."

"When may I come?" he insisted, with the same gravity. He was too deeply her debtor to quarrel with a form of speech.

"When you like, Tom," she replied, suddenly melting; "come when you like. Only don't let it bother her; don't get into trouble."

He kissed her hand, and went. His mind held only a confused sense that the end had come at last, quite simply and naturally. He had his freedom, but not through any change in the complexion of his life. Some one had given it to him. He had not fought for it. That was his punishment. And again, exactly as he did the day when he learned Teresa's hiding-place, he hailed a carriage and went post-haste to Matlock. But his mind was less like that of a triumphing lover than he could have imagined. His pulse beat hard; but instead of straining forward to meet Teresa, he was planning how he could provide for the other woman. She must be at ease; he must make her independent of the world.

Olga did not watch him away from the house according to her custom. Usually he left her so dreary among her alien surroundings that she kept her eyes upon him as long as possible. Now she stood, her hands clasped before her, and thought. The young

light faded out of her eyes. Her face grew pale. "Well?" she said almost interrogatively to herself. "Well!" She could not have told whether she cared very much, but surely something was reft away, and she bled a little. The wound might heal at once; but still it was a wound. St. John seemed irretrievably gone. She did not for a moment think she might keep him among her friends. The girl would prevent it, and wisely, too. This was good-by. She was left on a barren shore, and left alone.

Then, being a woman of the simplest faith in the practical, she put on her hat, in her turn called a carriage, and went down town to Brownell's office. He was the only person she had met in the city who had shown her a recognizing kindness, and he was a man of power, the sort she understood. Brownell was alone, walking up and down, hands in his pockets. At last he was worried. "Hesperides" was down again, eight points, and for no apparent reason. He had sought out his guides and asked the cause, perhaps the more brusquely in that Laura had infected him with some slight caution. But they gave him only generalities, the axioms in which he had once reveled. It was a reaction, they owned, but a healthy one. Then they smiled, and Brownell felt it was incumbent on him, too, to smile, and go away. He was behaving very much like a boy trying to be a man; but now he played the part nervously.

At the sound of feminine draperies, he started, thinking for a second of Laura; but seeing who it was, he exclaimed, in a surprised welcome. Olga gave him no time to do more than offer her the first conventional greeting.

"Mr. Brownell," she said, standing, and impressing him by her regal carriage, "I want to speak to you — about your little girl."

Brownell grew ashy.

"Claribel?" he gasped. "Anything happened?" For the instant, he could not remember the lack of connection between the two.

"No! no! I only want to speak about her. You told me you might take her away from school and give her a governess. If you want a governess, consider me. I could teach her music, French, German. I could take her abroad. I want something to do."

Brownell stroked his chin.

"Sho!" he said reflectively. "Out of a job? That 's too bad."

"But will you consider me?" urged Olga. "Will you?"

He was thinking of Laura. He meant to do nothing now without consulting her. But as he reasoned justly, she could have no more objection to this sumptuous creature than another.

"If I get a governess," he asserted, "I'll give you the first chance. Much obliged to you, too. I feel honored."

They shook hands, and Olga at once took her leave. But while she waited at the elevator, Brownell came hurriedly out.

"Say," he whispered, in a mystery of kindness, "you're hard up?"

"No," said Olga, smiling at him. "I'm not hard up yet." Then she went away, and he hurried back, to find "Hesperides" dropped seven points more.

When St. John reached the little house at Matlook

he was shown into the parlor and left there. Teresa had gone to walk, Mother Sanders said: she did not know which way. St. John took up his station at the window, and stood watching the road up and down, and longing to go out and meet her at the gate. But the hunger of life was strong upon him, and it counseled him to stay for a greater pleasure. She should not see him from afar, and compose her face; he was greedy of the moment when she should catch sight of him. While he waited, Mother Sanders went in and out, putting wood on the fire, and then getting a plate from the cupboard. At last she approached and spoke.

"It's fine weather we're having."

"Yes," he said courteously, "very fine weather."

She lingered, and her persistency drew his eyes. He looked at her with attention, and saw how like an old-world peasant she was with her plain skirt and sack, her close cap, and the wrinkled face which, in certain countries, follows early youth.

"She's a good child," said the old woman suddenly, "a good child."

St. John considered her curiously and said nothing. He had not Brandon's way of discerning human nature and finding his own kind everywhere. But the old woman persisted.

"Have you come to ask her to sing at a concert?" she asked.

"No," he said, somewhat stiffly, "I have n't."

"She can sing for ye, glory be to God!" said Mother Sanders. "The saints in heaven could n't sing sweeter. When she goes from this place she'll take the good luck of the house with her."

"She 's coming!" cried St. John. "Don't say I 'm here." He spoke imploringly, and thrown from his reserve, laid a hand upon her arm. She went out, shaking her head and murmuring certain mysterious words to herself. She knew that look in the eyes of man; and remembering Brandon, she wished it had been he.

Teresa came in radiant from her walk and perhaps some premonition of joy at the end of it. The color was in her cheeks, and she moved with the swift decision of one who has much to do. At his first glance, St. John knew she had not been warned of him. He stepped forward, and took her into his arms.

"Teresa," he said, "I have come for you. I love you. I have come to tell you so. I love you."

How it had hurt him to find the Child believed herself to be unsought, he had not known until now. There was pathos in his spending these first minutes in passionate assurance. She had felt shame at having given herself unasked. He tried to woo her in the oldest way of all.

"No! no!" she whispered. "No!"

"I love you," said St. John. "You've got to let me tell you."

"Oh, how cruel you are to tempt me so!" she cried. "How can you be so cruel to me?"

"It is all different now," he said, his own voice breaking. "There 's nothing between us. Tell me you love me." He looked at her pleadingly, his face moved as she had seen it, in those few happy days, into a youthful fire. He let her go, to look at her the better, and she moved away from him.

"You have n't done that?" she cried accusingly, "for me?"

"No."

"You told her!"

"Yes, I told her — but she does n't care, Teresa ; she does n't care. Nobody on God's earth cares a straw for me but you, and small blame to anybody. But you care, dear ? Tell me you care !"

"Yes," she said gravely, "I care. But you belong to her."

"Do you think that ?" he asked passionately. "Do you tell me that old debt has got to be paid ? Don't you know the payment of it would be a worse disgrace than owing something to the end of my days ?"

She had thought a great many things since he saw her, and one was that the debt must not be paid — not in that fashion. But there were other things she had pondered, too, and all on Olga's side, though these she could not say.

"You must never forget," she began with difficulty. "I must remember, too. She must not be forgotten."

"She shall not be forgotten," he said eagerly. "I will do everything" — But there he stopped, seeing how poor a thing it would be in the Child's eyes to mention money. Yet that was all he could do. "But you do care about me ?" he asked again jealously.

"Oh, yes !" she answered, "I care." And then she became aware that she felt a great joy in having him hers again. It was very serious ; it was not like the first blossoming of the tree. She was approaching him gravely, not with misgiving, but a recognition of life as it is, so far as she knew it. A few weeks ago, her lover had seemed a radiant being, dressed, as he was, in the mantle of her fancy. He was gone. In

his place was the creature whom she loved, who was her mate, but whose scars she saw, and must cover with devotion, as he, she humbly knew, would cover hers. Suddenly, with an ineffable gesture of acceptance, she gave him both her hands, and he took and kissed them. He had some understanding of what had battled in her mind. She had relinquished something, and taken something in its place. A dream had faded into the dawn.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder if you ought to marry me!"

"I don't know," said Teresa. "Am I going to?"

"Yes, dear, you're going to, — at once, — and we shall live abroad. Does that suit you?"

"If it suits you."

"No, you are the one. It's you — you. Nothing else! Your happiness, your voice! You must live for that now. I shall live for you, and you for your voice."

His ardor moved her blood, and her lips parted in pure pleasure.

"Ah!" said St. John, "you look now as you did those days, the first ones — when I knew you cared."

But at that, gravity settled upon her face. She had hours, days, and nights to remember, and as thought of them stretched before her like a faint gray vista, he seemed to perceive them, too, and was vaguely troubled.

"Teresa," he said, "I have made you unhappy. Whatever comes to us, I never can wipe out that."

The wife instinct rose up in her, and she answered, "No, I made myself unhappy. I loved you. And I grew up. It's just as well, dear. It's better. I had

to grow up some time. It was only because I had to do it so fast — that hurt.”

But as he stayed, and it was right to be near him and hear his voice, her joy came back, and with it all his own incredible happiness. They had with each other that sense of comfort which belongs to the few who are really mates. After they had talked a long time, he put her away from him and smiled at her.

“I fancy it’s the real thing, Teresa,” he said. “You have n’t much doubt of it, have you?”

“I have n’t any doubt,” answered the Child, smiling at him.

“You’re willing to take me as I am?”

“I take you as you are,” she said gravely, as if she repeated the marriage service.

“Oh, that does n’t mean I won’t be better! I’ll be — dear, I’ll be what will make you happy. I’ve *got* to make you happy. You’ll marry me, you’ll come abroad, — when?”

“I’ll come whenever you want me,” replied the Child, with a divine simplicity. But in a moment she turned to him, flushing with a triumph all her own. “Dear,” she said, “my voice is coming back.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FACE OF FEAR

THE dress rehearsal of the "Banished Queen" took place one afternoon, and for that night was billed the first performance. By this time Margaret doubted whether the play would go. Rehearsals had continued until everybody was tired. Amateurs had come for pleasure and remained to work; and most of them, having a child's comprehension of drudgery, wondered why they must drill so hard. There prevailed among them the impression that plays upon the stage were badly done, and that anybody could see it. Being so clever in noting it, they must be equally clever in doing better. But the spontaneity had gone out of them. Girls withdrew, at the last minute, as calmly as if they were refusing an invitation to dinner, with the announcement that the rehearsals took too much time. Their places had to be filled, and Margaret, on whom nervous matrons now cast all the burden of management, coached the understudies and wondered where they were all coming out. Still, tickets were sold at exorbitant prices; the theatre would be filled, though only by favor. Margaret was prepared for disaster, but at least she had not to endure the ghastliness of empty benches. There was some comfort in that, but not much; for she knew as well as the rest

why the world was coming, — not for her sake or that of the play, but because a Minerva performance was a sacred function which nobody in society, or society's wake, could afford to miss.

The dress rehearsal went smoothly enough, but with how much carrying power Margaret could not tell. The auditorium was packed with women, in deference to a pet by-law of the Minervas that their functions should be sacred to the sex, — a law to be broken that night for the first time. This was a fan-waving, fluttering audience, with a serious contingent in the boxes, those good ladies who are pulled hither and yon to patronize grave undertakings. The women applauded but little. Margaret did not know that they were greatly moved, and when she went home to rest, before the evening's performance, she was wretchedly cast down. Brandon met her at her door. He looked nervous, and she put out her hand to him, remembering it was his play, and that he must suffer through it.

"Well," he began, "how did it go?"

"Come in," said she, and he followed her into the library. There she sat down, and began taking off her gloves. He saw she looked worried, in spite of the nervous brightness of her eyes.

"Truly," she said, "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I do not. I'm afraid I played very badly. I didn't get hold of it at all, as I have sometimes. I'm sorry, Mr. Brandon. If your play is spoiled, you can blame me."

"Blame you, with those sticks and stones about you?" cried Brandon, moved at once to comfort her.

"Why, the general impression among them is that I'm lucky to have it in their hands because professionals might ruin it. There's cheek for you. I heard that clatter one afternoon at the Gilroys', when I stumbled on a lot of them drinking tea and talking Dante. Lord! How about that girl with no eye-brows? Did you get her made up?"

Margaret smiled, in spite of her worry.

"Yes," she said. "Her mother permitted it; but not until Miss Gilroy told her she was an idiot. She did, — plainly."

"The Gilroys have got more Copley portraits than the rest of 'em. They're the bellwethers of the flock." He sat for a moment, legs stretched out, hands in his pockets, staring from the window. Then he suddenly roused himself to the fact that it was Margaret who was carrying the whole thing on her shoulders, and that mere human kindness prescribed some faint encouragement. So he lied cordially. He rose and approached her, his fine smile lighting his face.

"Mrs. Warrener," said he, "we're hysterical. You're tired and I'm scared. The play is going, do you hear? It's a howling success. You can't tell anything from that packed house of feminine philanthropists. To-night is your first night. You'll see."

She looked up at him doubtfully.

"You mean that?" she asked. "You believe in me?"

"Absolutely!"

She caught some infection of his spirit. Then he went upstairs, at odds with himself and the foolish world. For he had an irritable vanity. It was seldom wounded because he was not audacious enough to put

himself in the way of scars. He lived, as he knew, a timid life. Now by a sudden impulse, he had dashed into the very path of failure, and he dreaded the evening like a man who has everything at stake.

Once it had seemed to Margaret that it would be a tremendous moment when Llandaff sat looking at her across the footlights. It would mean the cessation of their old life, the beginning of something new. Yet he was to see her in her part to-night, and she was not moved. He had shown her lately a wistful kindliness. It touched her, without promising anything warmer or more near. It was rather like a forlorn attempt to discharge some debt, and save her from more pain. At once it pleased and hurt her. He seemed to her like a child trying to be good; and her instinct was to release him from the rigor of that law.

At seven o'clock, Brandon came down again, hoping, in his soul, to hearten her, if words could do it. He found her ready, and Llandaff putting on her cloak. The carriage was at the door, and she stayed only to ask her husband,—

“You ’ll come with me?”

He hesitated.

“Don’t, if you’d rather not,” said Margaret hastily. “It’s very early.” She was white and resolved, with no eyes for him. At last, her task was uppermost.

Brandon, glancing at Llandaff, was startled. “Why,” he said to himself, “the man’s in terror!”

“Oh, you come round with me, Warrener!” he suggested, putting a hand on his shoulder, “if Mrs. Warrener doesn’t mind.”

Llandaff looked relieved, and Margaret went, call-

ing back to him, "Wish me luck! I shall look for you."

Brandon ran down to put her in her carriage, and when he came back, Llandaff was standing in the same place, staring at vacancy. His eyes were dilated. He breathed as if he had been running, and his hands trembled.

"Old man, you'd better take something to set you up a little," said Brandon. "I'll get you a Scotch." He was about to run upstairs, but still with the feeling upon him that the man ought not to be left alone.

"No! no!" said Llandaff, recovering himself. "I don't want it. It's air I need. Come along." He got his hat, and Brandon followed him down the stairs, presently putting a hand through his arm and turning toward the theatre. But when they were about to cross the street, Llandaff stopped.

"Brandon," said he, "I can't do it."

"Don't, then," said Brandon easily. But he was perplexed and worried. Warrener shuddered as he stood there.

"She'll be disappointed," he objected weakly.

"Mrs. Warrener? Oh, no! There are several more performances. You can see her then. Come home."

Warrener turned, and then stopped again, and shook his head.

"The fact is, Brandon," he said argumentatively, "I can't go home. It terrifies me."

"Then let's walk."

Brandon guided him down the street by a constraining hand on his arm, and they went along at a good pace. When they came to Doctor Milbanke's

door, Brandon, with the same decision, walked him up the steps, and was about to ring the bell when the doctor himself came out with Miss Olivia. He looked sharply from one to the other of the two faces, and then reëntered the house.

"Go along, Livvy," he said. "Send the carriage back for me."

But Miss Olivia followed them in. The doctor led the way into the library, and pointed to a couch. Llandaff allowed himself to be drawn to it, and sat there shuddering.

"You see, doctor," he said, as soon as he could speak, "I'm afraid."

"I know," said the doctor. He was busy with little vials at a cabinet. Meantime Miss Olivia put pillows under Llandaff's head, and then brought a rug, and covered him. Even in Brandon's perplexity he could not forbear a smile. He had always wondered why women never could let you lie five minutes without covering you. Yet here, in a case of extreme need, it seemed quite the right thing and a most comforting one to do.

The doctor brought a glass.

"Drink this," he ordered. "Come. Get up on your elbow. Drink!"

Warrener took the glass, looked at it, and gave it back. He shook his head.

"I can't, doctor," he said, smiling a little, sadly. "I'm afraid of it."

"Why?"

"It may be poison. You may have made a mistake."

"It's bromide. Drink it, man!"

Miss Olivia drew the glass away, and threw the contents into the fire.

"James," said she, "bring the bottle, and mix another dose. Here, Llandaff, you look, and see him do it."

The doctor obeyed her, as he always did in a case of human need. He gave her the glass with the new contents, and Miss Olivia drank composedly.

"There, Llandaff," she said, "now you'll take it. James, give him some more."

"Good old girl!" said the doctor, measuring again.

"I used to have to take all old Betsy's medicines before she touched them," said Miss Olivia apologetically, as if she would fain not accept too much credit for so simple a procedure. She offered Llandaff the glass, and, distracted, like a balky horse, by the simple jugglery, he took it, and drank obediently.

"Brava!" whispered Brandon. He was near clapping her on the back and calling her a good fellow.

"I suppose you think that will put me to sleep," said Llandaff. "It won't. Feel my pulse."

"No," returned the doctor, setting away the glass. "I don't want to put you to sleep."

Miss Olivia sat down in a methodical fashion by the couch, and took Llandaff's hand in hers.

"You just hold on tight, dear," she said compassionately. "Sometimes it helps a little."

"Feel my pulse," said Llandaff again to the doctor. "You can hear my heart beat. It's galloping me out of the world."

The doctor came back to the couch, and drew a chair alongside. He looked Warrener in the eyes, compelling his attention.

"Llandaff," he said, "do you want me to tell you exactly what's the matter with you?"

"Yes."

"Nervous exhaustion. You're used up, played out. You've got to go through a period of rest and feeding. Lots of women endure it like martyrs. It's a bore, but you've got to do it."

"You don't know! I could believe you, even about my heart, but not about my brain. I'm going crazy."

"Poor child!" said Miss Olivia. "Poor child!" She held his hand tightly, and it clung to her.

"You are not going crazy," said the doctor. "You are tired out. You've got to believe me and put yourself in my hands."

Llandaff had closed his eyes.

"I am suffering," he said, "the torments of the damned." Then he grew quiet, and by and by the doctor gave him bromide again.

Brandon lingered in the background, lest he should be needed, giving now and then a curious thought to his play, being glad in a fashion that whether it went well or ill he was not there to see. He looked upon Warrener with compassion and the distaste so often inevitable in the healthy human creature for a disordered mate. He had heard of breaking down, but never before had he seen the last stages under his own eyes. It looked like a particularly undesirable form of madness.

The evening went on, and the three remained there until Warrener, with his former calmness, sat up and said he must go home.

"Stay here with us, dear," said Miss Olivia, after a look at the doctor. But Llandaff refused.

"Margaret will expect me," he said. "She 'll be worried. She's got to play to-morrow, too."

Under the glow of the first generous emotion the patient had shown for months, Doctor Milbanke helped him off quite cheerfully, and took the carriage with him. They went up into the apartment, and Warrener let them in with his key, like any other sane man, promising to go at once to bed. But in bed, with the doctor sitting beside him, and Brandon waiting in the room outside, he fell to shivering, and looked at the doctor hopelessly.

"I'm afraid," he said again, like a child. The doctor drew nearer, and tried to bring his spirit under some control.

"It's a phase of your disordered nerves," he answered. "Remember that. It will pass. I'll see you through it."

But Llandaff was not listening. Whether it was the cunning of the disease, or the recurrent fatalism of some Puritan forbear, the old retributive phantom of the world rose up and daunted him.

"Doctor," he said, "you told me I had broken her heart, — Margaret's. Is this my punishment?"

"No! no! poor fellow," said the doctor, feeling anew the futility of translating inexorable and yet beneficent nature to a mind diseased. "Life is n't made that way. Your nerve is gone. You'll get it back — with time — patience. That's all."

"I believe in hell," said Warrener. "It has begun. But don't let her come in!" he exclaimed starting up.

"Who?"

"Margaret. She might see it was my punishment. She would n't say so, but I should know it from the

way she looked. Don't let her come in, nor — the other one."

"Nobody shall come in," the doctor promised him. Then he fell into quiet and slept.

The doctor sat there silent in the one room, while Brandon waited in the other. It was midnight when they heard the clang of the outer door, and both got into the hall as Margaret entered it. She was afire with joy and hope. Her mouth trembled. Her cheeks were glowing under their rouge. She held her arms full of flowers, and tossed them anywhere. Then she threw back her cloak, and gave Brandon both her hands.

"You did it!" she cried. "It's your play. I knew where you were when they called you. I had to make a speech and say you were the victim of modesty and had gone home. And me, too, doctor! They roared at me! It's a triumph! They have taken me back. Greenfield applauded. Oh, I loved him for it! Doctor, I am made." Something in their faces stopped her. "Where were you?" she asked. "I could n't find one of you. Where's Llandaff?" The last question came on the wings of alarm.

"He has given out," said the doctor, with a commonplace composure.

"How?"

Her face went white, and the triumph died in it.

"Nervously. He has been overdoing for weeks. We all knew it. We could n't help it. Now the crash has come. A good thing, too! We can keep him in bed."

Her face curdled into lines of pain. Brandon, watching her and hating suffering, wished to Heaven

he had gone upstairs and so escaped a picture he never should forget.

"Are you telling me the truth?" she asked, in an agony of suspicion. "It is his nerves? It is not" — She touched her shoulder where the flesh sometimes thrilled to remind her of Llandaff's wounds.

"The honest truth. It has nothing whatever to do with that, except as that helped to pull him down."

She started toward the door.

"I must go in," she said, with the tone of a mother who means to reassure herself of the child's safety.

The doctor put his hand upon her arm.

"He is asleep, Margaret."

"I'll go softly."

"He can't see you. He is afraid of everything. He is afraid of you."

"Of me?"

There was more than an anguished pathos in the tone; above all, there was humility. "Of me?" it said, "of me, his handmaid?"

Brandon went out of the room, and took refuge in the hall, where he could hear if Warrener stirred. The doctor continued, not deceived as to the inadequacy of his speech, but dragging out poor arguments because they were the best he had.

"When we are sick, we run away from our dearest. We have fancies. He says he broke your heart. He says he is in hell for it."

"Oh!" she turned again, in eloquent protest, but he detained her.

"No, Margaret, you simply can't. No emotions, even the kindest! Nothing but food and quiet for him now! Put yourself aside; you've done it be-

fore. Go to bed and sleep. I shall stay to-night. Brandon is here, too. Mind me, dear."

She gathered up her cloak, but still she stood there.

"You've got to play to-morrow night!"

Then she yielded with an obedience that touched him to the soul. Her face was eloquent of mother-love denied, the passion which is like nothing save that of the woman whose child is dying, and who, her breasts aching with milk, must see him die. She came back for her flowers.

"I will put them in water," she said absently. "I thought he might like them."

That night she slept, as it seemed to her afterward, through desperate resolve. Once she heard voices in Llandaff's room, and started up with the old impulse to go to him. But no desire is irrepresible, and she lay down again. The voices stilled, and again she slept. When she came out in the morning, Mrs. Bebington had served the doctor with coffee, and he poured her a cup and stood over her while she drank it.

"It was n't a bad night, Margaret," he said. "He tried to keep still, not to disturb you. He has you and the play on his mind. Brandon's gone now to telephone for a nurse."

CHAPTER XL

A CLOUDED VICTORY

THE nurse arrived that morning, and by force of her authority became the moving power of the house. Margaret found herself of no account. The whole thing was like a dream, with that poignancy of emotion which often accompanies a dream and awakens us to sobs and a vague after misery. Llandaff would not see her. The doctor told her that again, when he came in the afternoon, and she accepted it like some commonplace of illness. Doctor Milbanke reiterated what he had said the night before. Llandaff had broken down, and was condemned to the accepted regimen of extra food and quiet. It was not alarming, though exceedingly uncomfortable. But it would pass; under the right conditions, it always did. Then he turned his attention to Margaret, and laid orders upon her to go over to Miss Olivia, and allow herself to be put to bed, and rest for the night's performance. There she balked. If she left the house, she could not rest; but in hearing of Llandaff, she might find some tranquillity. So she wore through the day, and Brandon called, at seven, to take her to the theatre. He, as well as Doctor Milbanke, had no desire but to be at her hand through this double strain.

"You'll stay for the performance?" she said at the door.

Brandon foresaw an ordeal.

"I shall be in the balcony," he answered. "Then I can bolt." Margaret smiled at him wanly.

"You've less courage than I have," she said. "Don't be afraid. I won't disgrace you."

He sneaked up to his place in the balcony, feeling exceedingly foolish and young. It was more or less pleasant. He sat there and reflected, and tried to fit the philosopher he thought he was to the emotions of the youth which seemed to be possessing him. "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" he quoted, with a whimsical amusement at his gullible self. He was not a playwright; cold reason told him that. He had only chanced, through a sporadic effort, to attain a little brief success. But he was not young. The springs of life were not abundant in him, ready to catch the sun and sparkle back its splendor. In that wonderful morning time, if the artist fail, he can cast his work behind him and look forward, confident of the unguessed beauty that lies before. But none of this was for him. Neither was he, at this harvest moon of life, reaping the reward of work he should have done. He might have trained himself. There should have been long hewing and polishing until at last his pen would serve him like another hand. There had been a moment when it was easy to begin. Now the rudiments were all to learn, and he would never master them. Yet here he sat waiting for the curtain to go up on his play, and he was filled with all the tremors of first fruition.

The house was full and brilliant. There was the chatter of an "occasion," even through the orchestral prelude : for society either failed to understand that the orchestra was the great Adelphian, or vindicated its standing by treating it as grand opera has been treated when vanity goes to sun itself in the mirror of the world's glances. Then the curtain went up, and Brandon saw his two kings sitting at the conventional banquet, with his own courtiers. He had created them, and he choked with rapture. The play had been put on with a magnificence to satisfy the uncritical mind. But the author, as he looked, found his fervor cooling. Do what he would to enjoy his cup of pleasure, a lifetime's dramatic study stood in the way. His brain tripped up his enthusiasm, and he grew cold. These were amiable young women, exceedingly pleased at finding themselves in dramatic action ; yet they were not interpreters. They liked their little game, but it was nothing but a game ; art was another thing.

Margaret came on in the second scene, vigorously applauded on the strength of yesterday's press notices ; for the critical faculty, Laura Neale included, had told the world to admire and bow down. Brandon's heart rose at the sight of her. Immediately he believed and wondered, knowing what her future was to hold. She had been bred in a hard school, the school of old tradition, and short as her apprenticeship had been, the purity of her training stood her in hand. She was beautiful with the beauty of a body facile to emotion, and fitted to express meanings of the noblest order. Her face impressed him by its delicate significance, its adaptability to tragedy of the

keenest kind. She had the grace, the walk, the gesture of a woman born out of stage ancestry, and her voice was music. Brandon, looking at her, felt the sensation of tears rising to his throat, and his mind dwelt upon the wastefulness of a world where a man could possess so pure a treasure without retaining it. Warrener seemed to him the inheritor of cup and purse in being beloved by such a woman ; but Warrener himself had never known how rich he was. Here was a creature full of uncomprehended sweetness, eloquent, at every movement, of that ineffable principle never yet defined, but drawing man eternally. And Warrener had not understood. Brandon thought of it all with great sadness, remembering, too, that his own day of life was over. He, also, had come to the fountain, but the waters had been muddied for him. He had squandered his capital, gambled it away for that which was naught, but nevertheless he still saw the vision. That gave him a momentary joy. It was better to suffer great hunger than to forget such longing could exist. So, in a manifold regret he sat and saw his play.

The scene took Margaret swiftly through the bewildered grief of a woman who sees herself supplanted, to the overthrow of reason when she learns that even religion and the state consent to her dethroning. Then came the final darkening of her mind, her exile, and that forest scene where she comes upon the king himself, and memory strives within her to guess who he may be, so near to her and yet so alien. This was the madness that has ceased to suffer, and yet can awaken suffering in him who looks upon it, only through its innocent babbling of memories that kill.

It was a most pathetic picture of one so dulled by grief that grief itself can do no more. Margaret possessed the stage, and blotted out the blemishes of those about her as queens eclipse their subjects. Brandon could have asked for nothing truer. Whether this was the beginning of life for him, or a radiant stopping-place, it had dowered him with the riches of the kingdom of earth. He had planted a seed, and this woman had brought it into bloom. He felt a boundless gratitude.

He was waiting, for her at the stage door, and in silence put her at once into her carriage. Then he got in after her, and still he did not speak. Margaret was amazed. The consciousness of power had arisen in her. It was neither favorable notices nor the delirium of a fashionable audience that had filled her with this new wine of the spirit. She believed in herself and her own genius; she recognized it rapturously, as we welcome back the lost. So should we greet the beloved dead, if they came knocking at our door. Yet Brandon did not speak, and her high heart began to fail.

"It's no use," he said at last, when they neared home. "I can't talk to you about it. But you must understand that, for the space of two hours, I have been perfectly happy, and you made me so."

"You liked it!" cried Margaret, in a breath falling tumultuously upon the heels of his speech.

"Liked it! I adored it."

"Did I please you?"

"You are a wonder."

"Ah, but it's your play!"

"It's not the play. It's you, the sorcery of the

artist, the creature that makes. I tell you, when we get a taste of the real thing, it turns all our expedients flat in the mouth."

"Am I the real thing?" She was hungry for praise. Starvation was upon her, the clamor of the years when she had been turning her emotions wastefully into that other channel. It pushed the cry from her lips.

"You are as real as any of them that ever walked," said Brandon, with conviction. "There aren't many. I don't know what the difference is between them and the rest of us; but the difference is there. You've been anointed with the sacred oil. You are called. Sometime I shall say so in print. I can't now, because this poor little show is my own. But sometime I shall."

She could not thank him, but she felt the laurel crown of praise. They went upstairs together, and he said good-night to her. She gave him her hand, and looked at him with brilliant eyes. Unquenchable depths were lighted in them. Brandon understood. He, too, was greatly moved.

"Remember," he said, "you're to call me if Warrener wants anything in the night."

Then he went up to his pipe and his dreams, seasoned now by some bitter flavor of memory untouched with hope. In the theatre, under the contagion of her art and temperament, he was a man who had brought some bud to bear. Now, under the dissuading influence of reflection, he was still a dreamer who had failed. These walls knew him as he was; he could not deceive them. "Remember the mood of another year, the repentance of the year before," they whis-

pered with satanic truth. They were remorseless, and he acquiesced, and bowing the head, acknowledged that he was the man he was, not the man he might have been. Yet while he chewed the cud of a bitter fancy, some softening veil descended on him. He was not often tolerant of himself; to his own deeds, he showed scarce human justice. Still sometimes it did come to him that even if he had drawn back from art, abashed, he had grappled with life like a wrestler. There were no brilliant deeds to crown him, no purple for his wear; but he had plodded along as well as he knew how, under a darkened sky.

Margaret went into her room, and was met immediately by the nurse, with a message from Warrener; he wished to see her. She stilled her manner to a false calm, and hurried in to him. He was lying in bed, so sane and natural that she throbbed with thankfulness. Indeed, he was more like his old self than for weeks, because even two days' rest had smoothed some lines away. He put out his hand to her, and she sat down beside him.

"How did it go?" he asked.

"Splendidly!" She would not even add what was on her tongue, "I so wanted you to be there!" Even that seemed some slight demand.

"Good girl!" he said, and patted her hand. "Clever girl!"

"Perhaps I am a clever girl, Llandaff," she agreed, whimsically. "Mr. Brandon says so."

Llandaff was regarding her solemnly.

"You are very lucky," he said. "You'll do something yet. Then you'll be happy. Don't fret, Margaret! you'll be happy sometime. You'll play; that will make up."

She bent and kissed his hands.

"I don't fret," she said softly, as if she might disturb the bloom of some repose. "And I am happy. But I'm chiefly happy because you are awake to see me. Good-night. I love you." She was so unmoved in the avowal that it hardly disturbed him more than a perfume or a breath. It was the most exquisite wifehood, and yet something too large and too impersonal for that.

She got up, and, nodding her good-night at him, went quietly away. Llandaff lay and thought about her. She puzzled him. She brought a kind of radiance with that strange affection which called for no return. He began dimly to feel, without defining it to himself, the maternal principle which is at the root of love, — undying sacrifice, unfading benediction. He acquiesced in it, and rested more easily because she was in the next room.

He longed for Laura. His blood incessantly made outcry for her ; yet something new had grown up between him and Margaret. He had a strange dependence on her as a spirit that would stand between him and evil, and deal out mercy to the end.

CHAPTER XLI

THE BLIND GODDESS

NEW ENGLAND stirred under the touch of spring. Whatever was doing in country woods, the city had a taste of it. The newspapers held items about young buds swelling only to be nipped, but there was ineffable promise in the air, and nobody could believe that such a spring would really prove insolvent. Brownell caught the witchery, and whistled as he went down town. He thought of Matlock, and wondered how it would seem to be there, spading up the old-fashioned garden. Another house party was in his mind ; and, somewhat shamefaced over his plebeian instincts, he considered whether it might not be accomplished without a panoply of servants. It seemed to him that he and Laura, the Warreners, and Brandon might run down there with a plain cook, and carry on affairs for a week, to their own satisfaction. He had a boyish longing to see Laura among homely scenes, doing humble tasks, as his mother had done them ; no woman was quite perfection to him who could not wipe a dish. That Laura had not yet taken hold of life at that end was only because circumstance had not demanded it. He never doubted her keeping house supremely well.

But going to his brokers that morning for an idle

watching of the tape, he found his hopes dispersed. The market had broken. There was ill news. The "Bayberry" lode, said by popular fable to cross "Hesperides," had given out, and "Hesperides" was running down like stitches in an ill-knit web. The other coppers were following, and panic had come. Crazy scenes were being enacted. Insane infection was in the air. The gambler look cropped out on hundreds of faces that had other looks for other days. Men ran, asked questions, glanced down on the shouting mob in the Exchange, and then asked more questions. And all the time, in country solitudes, nature was laboring serenely at her work, her face turned to that great business of stirring rootlets and bringing buds to swell.

Brownell did not run with the rest. The present danger, the magnitude of it, paralyzed him. His fresh-colored face grew white and flabby. He sought out his present chief, young Hooker, who was at his desk, and waited, staring at him with round eyes. Hooker, meantime, read the ticker, now and then speaking a decisive word through the telephone. He was a blonde, clear-cut young man, with an ugly jaw and the love of good living about the mouth. Brownell sank back into the chair he had taken, and for an instant breathed easily. He felt that irrational confidence which rises in us when the doctor comes. Here, he felt, was an expert and his friend, a man who knew and who could act. He, Brownell, did not know, nor, at this juncture, had he the nerve to act. Hooker gave him a sharp little nod and a perfunctory smile. He expected to have trouble with Brownell, and the chance of it had come at an inconvenient time. But

he continued to speak through the telephone, and Brownell, gapingly, with desperate eyes, tried to interpret what he said.

"Touch up 'Vodka' a little. Can't? Let her go, then. No! no! 'Hesperides'? No, not a share."

"What 's that about 'Hesperides'?" cried Brownell desperately.

Hooker laid down the receiver, and glanced at him. He looked ugly. His jaw stiffened. His eyes had the fighting glint. He was conscious of no personal enmity toward Brownell. He rather liked him. But a combat was on, and they two were in it.

"They're throwing it overboard," he said calmly.

"Is it down?" asked Brownell, ashy.

"Twenty points."

Brownell got up, shaking.

"Are you buying it in?" he asked.

"My dear fellow," said Hooker with an immovable calmness, "are you?"

"No, I can't. You know that."

"It would n't pay you. 'Hesperides' has gone under. In ten days it won't be worth two dollars a share."

Brownell got up and tried to stand without shaking so. The room went round, and mechanically he clutched at his collar.

"Do you know how much I'm holding?" he asked.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"I can't advise," said Hooker, taking up the receiver again, "I really can't."

Brownell saw, as in a vision, the figures representing what used to be his "little account." The sweat started on his forehead as he estimated what it meant

if they were cancelled. He broke into one of Hooker's telephone orders.

"How much 'Hesperides' do you hold?" he asked.

"Pardon me," said Hooker, and continued to speak.

Brownell repeated the question, and then Hooker looked him full in the face with an uncompromising glance.

"I really can't say."

"Have you been getting out yourself?" shouted Brownell. His voice choked him. He felt as if all the blood he had was surging into his face. "God Almighty!"

He looked dangerous in his rage, and Hooker, seeing the preliminary signs of trouble, gathered himself to rise and meet him. There was no need. Brownell turned, dashed out of the room, and back again to his brokers. But nobody had leisure for him. They had time for his orders, not for advising him, and that was what he wanted, — counsel, a quiet corner, to sit down and think without this terrible babel of voices outside: a moment to decide in. But while he thought, time would be lost. While he resolved, this terrible madness, this Mænad process of buying and selling, was sweeping on to the appointed end, which was his ruin.

As Laura had always known, he was as little fitted as a baby for this hurly-burly of the street. Emergency paralyzed him. His mind could not ignore the assault upon his nerves, and seclude itself for quiet action. He was undone. But when helplessness began to bring a madness of its own, he roused himself. With the ill-regulated zeal of the man who does

things at the wrong time, and acts the more furiously because he has delayed so long, he put in selling orders right and left. Of his own accord he was knocking down the market, and the whisper went about among those who guessed his plight that Brownell was throwing over "Hesperides." There was no market for it. Hooker was right, though even his prophecy that in ten days it would be worth two dollars a share, was wide of the truth. In ten days it was not to be quoted at all; and it only came up afterward as one of those dead issues, galvanized in time of general flood, to catch the unwary.

Brownell fought out his day as the soldier fights it, separated from his leader and his comrades, but staggering blindly about the field, ignorant whether the battle is lost or won, and dealing his own futile blows because he is bound to deal them. At three o'clock, when the market closed, he felt the sobbing relief of a temporary respite; but he had not the nerve, like veterans of that war, to stay and count the slain. He hurried away, putting off the moment; and the broker summoned him back.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Brownell," he said, "but I shall have to call on you for more margin."

"How do I stand?" asked Brownell doggedly. The broker passed him a little slip, holding pertinent facts; they read like a sentence of death.

"You see your equity is entirely insufficient to justify us," he said. "We are really forced to call upon you. Indeed, for the present, we shall be unable to carry coppers on a margin at all. We shan't buy them, except for cash."

"Sell out," said Brownell, looking ghastly. "Sell

out. I'll be down in the morning. I can't give you any more margin. I have n't got it to give."

The other man took time for one pitying look at him, as he walked haltingly away. Lambs were shorn every hour, but it was seldom that one went out so naked to the blast.

Brownell hesitated at the outer door, blinded by the sunlight, that cruelty of nature when trouble is upon us.

As he stood there pondering, many eyes were turned on him. These men knew who he was, — Brownell, who had gone under. His look betrayed all the trouble they guessed; he was the moral of the day. Presently, with a sudden resolve, he called a cab and ordered the man to Randall's office. Randall was the oil magnate with whom he had some slight acquaintance, and whom, but yesterday, he had regarded as his financial peer. Now Randall was still a sovereign, and he was nobody.

That night when Laura came home, just after dinner, she went into her sitting-room to drop her parcels, with that haste she had when she was dispirited and anxious to forget the day. She looked quickly round on entering. The room was still, but something told her she was not alone. Brownell was there. He rose from a chair in the corner, and came stumbling forward. He had been waiting since five o'clock, and though he was sick for food, afraid to go away lest he should lose her. The very sight of her gave him the assurance for which he longed. It was that sense of completion for which Llandaff was, at the same moment, hungering below.

"Laura!" cried Brownell, with a boyish appeal in

his voice. Strangely enough, this was the first time he had called her by her name. In spite of her perpetual suggestion of intimacy, there was always a distance between them. But now he longed for her inexpressibly, not her counsel but her heavenly comforting. He had no experience of the women who did not console. In barren years, they were the more divine. He relied upon her help, and knew he had only to stretch out his hand to meet it.

Her face lighted at once, with the expectation of facts. She gave him her hand, and he held it desperately, while he led her to a seat. Then he sat down before her, his eyes feeding upon her. He had a consuming regret that she must suffer through his loss; but it did not seem to him that the deed was in any sense his fault. Such a fate might have stricken any one. He even smiled, resting beforehand on the angelic certainty of a woman's pardon.

"Well," she said sharply, "how do you stand?"

He temporized.

"Have you seen the papers?" he asked.

"Seen the papers? Of course I've seen the papers. I've been in touch with the whole thing all day. Did you know yesterday, in time to sell?"

He shook his head. She smiled ironically, not with interest in him, but the consistency of the event.

"Hooker did, it seems. Hooker took in sail."

He lay back in his chair, as much overcome by physical exhaustion as by the present tragedy. He closed his eyes. Her face looked too eager, too strenuous. It commanded him, and he had no strength even to obey.

"Laura," he said again, "I don't believe I can

talk about it. Somehow my mind won't work. Let's go and get something to eat. You come with me."

Laura did not answer. She withdrew her hand, and went over to the table, where she took up a pencil, and began tapping with it on a sheet of paper.

"Tell me where you are," she ordered. "As well now as any time! I know what you did with 'Hesperides.' You threw it overboard, block after block. The market was breaking. You held on only to smash it." The words sounded like an accusation.

"But, Laura," he said, gathering himself to meet her, "I could n't help it. I could n't hold up the whole thing alone. They would n't stand by me."

She nodded.

"They had got through with you," she said. "They had their report on 'Jason' yesterday."

"Yes," he answered hopelessly, "I had mine. It ain't worth the powder to blow it up."

"What else were you carrying?" she asked. Brownell roused himself, as the jaded horse recovers for a futile plunge. He told her, and she put down names and prices without a comment. Then, with knitted brow, she sat figuring, and at the end looked at the result in an amazement that partook of admiration. "It is absolutely incredible," she said. "If I saw it in a book, I should n't believe it. You've juggled with thousands as if they were ten-cent pieces. You've played your game. It was n't a clever one. There was n't any artifice in it. Just blind obedience, buying when you were told and selling when nothing would save you!"

The stimulus of her voice, not hostile but dispassionate, stirred him to some reply. He felt the lash,

with no disposition to resent the justice of it ; so a dog turns to lick the hand that wounds him.

"You don't think I've been prudent, dear," he said. "I guess I have n't. I soared too high. But there never was a minute when I forgot you, or risked too much for you. That note of yours you made me take, I tore up as soon as I got out of the house, as long ago as that. Every dollar I made for you I paid in to your account. There's a tidy little sum there. Nobody can touch it."

She still sat frowning at her paper. Yet she was not debating altogether over that, but over him. He seemed so fatuous, so childish in matters needing only a man to cope with them, that she wondered whether she had any use for him at all. Laura seldom gave up any human creature. It was a part of her policy of life. Constancy cost nothing. Good-nature was a coin current everywhere, and even the lion never knew when he might need the mouse. But Brownell was getting on her nerves, and to-day the irritation had grown unbearable. If he had come to her with fortunes blasted through some clever venture, she could have hoped for other schemes more promising. But he had fallen through the clumsiest device ; he was expiating his own idiocy.

Brownell went on. Certain explanations were due her, though he hardly knew how they were to be put.

"I can't say much about the way I feel," he urged brokenly. "I don't even know yet how I feel myself ; but I 'ain't much doubt about what it is when it touches you and Claribel. She 'll have to come away from school. The carriage will be sold. The cook must go. But I'm in my prime. I can begin over,

as better men do, when the ground is cut out from under their feet. I suppose some fellows would offer to give you up. But you ain't that kind of a woman, dear. The tighter a chap was strapped, the more you 'd cling to him." He smiled at her in a perfect trustfulness. She still looked thoughtfully at her paper, and made little marks on it, while she weighed, not his fortunes, but himself, to his own undoing.

"I've kept a share in the business," he went on. She looked a quick inquiry. "Soap, the Neatsfoot, you know — where I made my pile. I can go back into the concern. I'm good for general manager, if nothing else."

"Are you holding anything whatever?" she asked. "Any coppers?"

"Yes, — 'Bayberry'; but that's a good dividend-paying stock. I shall double my margin on it tomorrow; I've got enough for that. Randall helped me out."

"Randall?" cried Laura, alert. "He's taken you up? He lent you money? Why?"

"He didn't lend it. I sold him the Matlock property."

Laura rose and pushed back her chair. Her face grew red under a slow suffusion.

"You sold him the Matlock property?"

"Yes," said Brownell innocently. "That was the only hold I had on him. I told you he wanted it. I could n't have got a cent out of him."

"You sold that house?" Such feeling was in her voice as he had never heard there. It startled him, and roused him to some sense of her tragic possibilities. "What did you ask him for it?" she demanded quietly.

"Two thousand more than I gave for it. I'd made some improvements."

She broke into a laugh, the prolonged laugh of an irrational mirth.

"And you might have doubled it, trebled it," she cried, in the high voice of approaching hysteria. "There's nothing he would n't have given for it, he wanted it so. And you asked him two thousand more than you paid for it!"

"That's a third more than it's taxed for," said Brownell patiently.

Laura sobered long enough to look at him, and, his scattered wits reported, as if she hated him; though still she smiled. She was in the habit of thinking she had a perfect control of her temper; but she cared for so few things that calmness was an easy matter. Her mind was forever fixed upon results. Like other leaders, she could afford to skip details. But the oncoming rush of her rage against him was too great. It swept her into speech.

"You sold that house!" she repeated, with a concentrated passion that startled him also to his feet, "the only thing on earth I wanted! You think because you have made me a few thousand dollars, when a man of any wit could have made ten times as much, — you think that compensates me. You are a fool, a fool, I tell you, — a fool!"

"Laura," he gasped, "don't say such things. Why, you told me you did n't want the house. I asked you in Matlock. You told me so. You said your cousin wanted it."

"And you believed me!" she cried, stridently. "You could see me there perfectly happy only at

being there again, you could see me there at leisure, loving the very walls of the place, put me at the head of the table, and not know what it meant to me! Why, what else was it that made me tolerate *you*? Your stupidity, your asinine vanity over what you can't do, your blatant Americanism, — what else have I endured that for, but the house that has gone out of my hands forever!" She was in a fashion oblivious of him, though her rage was aimed that way. Not for an instant did her narrowed eyes read his face, with its horrified protest. A blur of anger was over her sight. He swam before her like a vision.

"Laura!" he gasped, "don't! don't!"

She pulled herself up, with a movement of scorn.

"I won't," she said. "It is n't worth it." She turned from him and sat down by the window, where she looked into the street, her eyes unwinking under that angry film. She did not tremble, like a woman of less poise. Her nerves were tense as whipcords, and as pliant to her will. Brownell was still regarding her with a miserable questioning, as if in him only must lie the secret of such a torrent from so pure a source. He could not at once adjust himself to the certainty that this marvelous creature had spat out toads instead of pearls.

"Laura," he asked tremblingly, "what have I done to make you hate me so?"

"You have not done anything," she said, in a dispassionate tone. "You have followed out your nature as I have followed mine. You are that particular sort of a creature who can be led by the nose, to his own ruin. You have let us all lead you. Now you are done, and by as clumsy a process as I ever saw.

If you were a knave, there would be some hope for you. You are a fool, and there is n't any." She spoke with the brutal indifference of one who fails to see the slightest value in what her eye has fallen on.

Brownell looked about vaguely for his hat. He had dropped it on the floor at his side, and now he took it up, brushed it mechanically with his sleeve, and put it on. To Laura, the action had a curious and subtle significance. She could have smiled over it. He had not waited until leaving her presence, but fitted it on as if he were beginning a long and arduous journey toward which no detail must be lacking. She felt an uproarious mirth at his solemnity, and it came into her mind to ask if he had pemmican for the trip; but she refrained, since that would only daze him further and give matter for more words. At the door he turned back, evidently with a confused idea of a ceremony not concluded.

"Good-by," he said haltingly.

"Good-by," she answered.

"Laura!"

"Well!" she said obligingly. Her good-nature had come back. She was ashamed of wasting ammunition on a thing so weak.

"If a man ever cares about you again," said Brownell, with a simple directness more convincing than any passion, "you prize it, my girl. You may want it some time." He went out and down the stairs. Laura, so left, relaxed into a great sadness for herself alone. Her hopes were broken, and she was not the woman to hesitate in owning it. Now she looked forward with a dreary vision, and found herself almost where she had been, — some thousands richer, but by

no means secure enough to leave her daily work. The house, the one idealism of her life, was lost. She was defeated.

Brownell, going blindly into the hall below, found a woman beside him. He pulled open the heavy door and saw, in the moment, that it was Olga. Tears were on her cheeks. He took off his hat hastily, and would have left her; but she gave a little cry.

"Oh, I'm so glad! I'm in such trouble."

He stopped, vaguely moved at the sound of her voice, because it was kind. A shiver went over him, remembering that other voice he had just heard, so rasping in its anger. This one was comforting from its softened note, though the softness came only from self-pity.

"I am in such trouble. I came to see Miss Neale about it. She got me into it. She must tell me what to do."

He stayed then, because it seemed to him if Laura had anything to do with her case, it must be cruel. "What is it?" he asked.

Olga stood in the hall, and looked at him piteously. Her soft cheeks were crushed as if she had been crying a long time. Her eyes still ran over. She confessed, in the simplest fashion.

"I told Miss Neale all I knew about the rehearsals of the play. I told her the funny things, what Mrs. Gilroy said, and her daughter, and all the other girls that came to the house. And she's made an interview of it, and put it in to-night's paper. She has n't used any names, but everybody knows who is meant. Mrs. Gilroy is furious with me. The old lady is furious. They have discharged me. I don't know where to go."

"Well, wherever you go, don't you climb these stairs." He could not use Laura's name. "Run back there. They won't turn you out to-night."

"No! but early in the morning I must go. And I have n't got any money, and the bank is n't open." She could not say what was in her mind, that, feeling altogether friendless, it had been her instinct to hasten at once to St. John. Laura was a pretext. She did not blame Laura. A shabby trick had been played on her, but she had seen too much chicanery to think it could be fought. It was a hopeless conclusion of her life that every man was for himself: every woman, too.

"Let me give you some money," said Brownell. "But don't you go to a hotel to-night. Ride back there, bold as brass, and stay. Get away in the morning."

"Shall I?" said Olga, with a pretty obedience. "Well, I will."

They went out together, and he called a carriage and put her into it. But Olga laid a hand on his arm. "You won't forget me?" she said imploringly. It was the kind of appeal she had used to wandering barons, but it was honest. "I'm all alone. I've got nowhere to go. If you want anybody for your little girl, tell me."

Brownell stood still, while the carriage waited. Then he spoke.

"I ain't a rich man any more. I've lost money."

"Oh!" said Olga softly. "I'm sorry."

"But I've got enough to live on, in a small way. I shall take Claribel out of school. I can't afford to keep her there. If I hired a little place, out of town,

maybe, would you stay there with her and take care of her? I may go West. I don't know where I'll be. I've got to build up some kind of a business. But if you look out for Claribel, I'll look out for you."

It was the unworldly man speaking to a woman who had never been very far inside received conventions. Olga believed in him, his kindness, his integrity.

"I'll come," she said gratefully. "I'll come any time."

"Then to-morrow you send me word where you're going to be," said Brownell, "and I'll run round and see you."

They parted, and each felt the world a little less large and lonesome, for having found some semblance of a friend.

CHAPTER XLII

A BRIDE AT THE DOOR

ON the last day of the "Banished Queen," St. John appeared at Margaret's door. When he entered, she knew something had happened. His step was alert, his eyes were full of purpose.

"I want to tell you first," he said. "We are going to be married."

Margaret got up and gave him her hand.

"I'm glad," she said sincerely. "I am tremendously glad."

He looked the expectant bridegroom. She could see what Teresa found in him, though no man might give much weight to it: the virile charm, destined to conquer whether it is worthy or not. And it was worthy. It needed supplementing, the woman soul beside it, the patient, the all-believing. Some lines came into her head from the Marcus Aurelius she had taken up, one day, at Miss Olivia's: "What if thou art lame, and canst not scale the rampart alone? Perhaps thou canst scale it with the aid of another." St. John would attempt it with that other's aid.

"You are going to be married!" she repeated. "Oh, I'm glad! I'm glad! I must go down to see her, when the play is over."

"She is coming up this afternoon. We want to

see the 'Queen' together, this evening. She takes her old room here, and then — we sail for Italy."

"Really? How you are rushing her! Splendid! I approve."

St. John looked and spoke like a boy who found his good fortune too precious to be forgotten for a moment.

"I want to begin to give her things, to make her happy. I have n't known very much about fairy stories, but I dare say I can invent one — for Teresa."

"Wonderful things can happen in Italy!" She gave him her hand again, and he was grateful. It seemed necessary for Teresa to have a woman standing by her at this time. When he had reached the door, Margaret called him.

"Mr. St. John," she said, "you're going to let her use her voice?"

"Let her! I'm going to *make* her use it."

"Suppose she wants to sing in public?"

"She can sing on the house-tops if she likes."

"Suppose she wants to sing in opera?"

St. John looked at her with a whimsical face.

"Then I shall have to travel round and be second fiddle," he said, — "the tail of the kite! but the tail is very necessary. Oh, you need n't be afraid! I've no doubts about our relative importance to the world. I'm no account. She shall win out, if I can make her."

Margaret lost no time in telling Brandon the news, from some undefined feeling that he ought to know it before meeting Teresa. So she called him in and made the announcement briefly, as St. John had done with her.

"Teresa Hope is coming up to-night, to see the play."

"So!" said Brandon joyously. His first thought, in an egotism new to him, was that Teresa came because it was his play.

"She is going to take her old room," said Margaret, not with any idea that he cared what Teresa did, save in a philanthropic desire of rescuing her from undesirable suitors. "Next week she is to marry Mr. St. John, and they go abroad at once."

"What!" shouted Brandon. "Marry St. John?"

"Yes." Margaret watched him smilingly for a moment. Then it came upon her that she had dealt him a wound, and she was sorry.

"Well!" said Brandon. "Well! there's no saving anybody, is there?"

"No, not from the things that belong to them. You irritate me about those two people. You trouble me."

"Those three people!" corrected Brandon, in a bitterness for which he felt shame. "Don't forget the other woman."

"That chapter is closed. I don't know how; I don't care. But I trust Teresa sufficiently to feel it has been closed honorably."

"Can chapters be closed like that?" asked Brandon. His face looked sweet and serious, and what he said did not sound at all as if it were to the disadvantage of another man. "I don't think they can. We build up a relation with a human being. The card-house may fall, of itself. But suppose it does n't? Can we kick it over because it ceases to please us? I think not."

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"We can't refuse to do things for people when they've grown away from us," said Margaret, answering in his own key. "That's the loyalty we owe them. But we can't keep on with the semblance of an affection that is dead. We can't pretend to love when love is gone. That's lying. That's treachery."

"Giving the children's meat to dogs! I know. But if we've established a kennel, the dogs must be fed. I only make the suggestion."

"There would n't be any growth, any development," she continued hotly. "The doors are n't closed forever, because we've made a mistake. You won't let us breathe!"

She looked most passionately alive, and Brandon wondered at her, knowing how she was clinging to a bond outworn. He began dimly to see that she had learned the paradox of being, the losing of life to save it, the storing of new wine for the day of sacrament.

"But don't you understand," he said broodingly, "that when we marry a woman, we come bearing gifts? We bring her the accumulated habits of our past. And if we have n't been gods and heroes, the longer that past has been, the worse it is for her. A man washes his slate clean, and writes one name on it. Well, it's the best he can do, when all's spent. He thinks he can wipe out his debts by one canceling stroke. But can he? She scents them in the air a million times a day. St. John is n't a bad fellow, but I'd marry him to a woman of the world — a widow — who smelled of sachet. I would n't give him that flower to wear in his coat."

"Ah!" cried Margaret, "everything is wiped out by one canceling stroke."

"I-it? What I have made myself, that I am. So is everybody."

"You talk as if we wives had no sins of our own. The man has to forgive ours. We forgive his."

Brandon thought of Teresa in her untouched youth, and then of Margaret herself. He was always the woman's partisan, and he smiled tenderly, thinking how incredibly sweet such creatures seemed to him.

"I don't mean all of you," he said. "I mean some of you. What I object to is that you seem to depend for your happiness on man, a being who is utterly incapable of giving it to you."

"Heavens!" cried Margaret. "I wish you were n't so clever!" She looked desperate, and Brandon laughed.

"Did that strike you as clever?" he asked. "It is n't. It's only a crude kind of cynicism. The form of it attracted me. You'll see it in the paper to-morrow. But you needn't think I consider myself a better fellow than St. John. I did n't mention it before beginning my oration, but that's understood."

"The trouble is," said Margaret, "you don't know what marriage is, and I'm not wise enough to tell you. If you love a creature, his faults make him the dearer" —

"I know. Some of you like to forgive."

"We don't. We rebel against it. We want to worship and adore. But what sins he has are ours, too. We lift them with both hands. We're glad to know the penalty falls on us. Perhaps it makes it less for him. We rejoice in suffering for him."

"Ah well," said Brandon, finding his spectacles a little blurred, "you know it all. I don't. Have your

way, you heavenly ministrants!" Then he went upstairs, and Margaret sat for a time, in an ecstasy of loyalty toward him who seemed to love her no more.

The last night of the "Banished Queen" was one to be remembered. The house was overflowing. Even the standing room was taken, for now, after society had bought its tickets for the Minervas' sake, the world of arts and letters came crowding in to see Margaret Warrener. She was billed by her old stage name, Margaret Leigh. Greenfield had suggested that, and, indeed, insisted on it. If he gave her an engagement in the autumn, he wanted to join her present to her past, and reap the benefit of all extraneous advertising.

Brandon, from his place in the balcony, thought less of the play that night than of Teresa, sitting in front with St. John. He watched the side of her face, the delicate profile turned ever, when it was possible, with a pretty uplift, to the man she loved. Brandon prayed, so far as it was possible for him to pray, and always that she might be happy.

The piece swept on to a triumphant conclusion, and at the end the curtain went up again and again, not only for pretty amateurs deluged with flowers from a loyal *claque*, but with honest homage to Margaret Leigh. She had arrived. The moment was hers, and it was one she could repeat. Her hand was on the pulse of this little people. It beat for her. She had achieved, and she was not afraid. She felt again the egotism of the true artist who sweeps the world into his net and feels it all too meagre. She breathed the breath of favor, and throve upon it. But still her heart kept dropping with the old unquenchable pity

and yearning for the creature she loved, who was at home paying his price in suffering.

After the play, Teresa came into Margaret's room to be kissed and made much of for her happiness' sake. Margaret held her off and looked at her, and Teresa, realizing why, responded to the gaze, all smiling sweetness.

"You're happy!" said Margaret softly.

"Yes," said Teresa as quietly, "I'm happy."

But Margaret could see, by some subtlety of sense, that the Child had learned already how little it matters about being happy. The challenge ought to have been, "You love him" and the answer, "I am beloved."

"But you are a good deal more than happy," said Teresa shyly. Margaret seemed a very great and wonderful person to her, removed, not so much through a few more years, as a regnant art and the distinction it had given her. "You are going to do beautiful things."

"You will do beautiful things, too," said Margaret, as one artist recognizes another.

Teresa remembered what St. John had said to her about her voice, and all they two would make of it. "I hope so," she said simply.

She went up to her little room, and looked about it with a sense of change. There was a happy security in every corner of it, and she matched the past with the present, playing that the last few weeks had never been at all. But they were insistent. They would be recognized; and a moment reminded her that she would not deny them if she could. For if she forgot them, she must relinquish also things that were

most dear,—days and nights of solemn thought and solitary questioning. There was love, too, to remember,—Margot's silent love and Mother Sanders's service. That old woman had become a part of her own life. Living so near the earth and aspiring to heaven as well, she had the magic of both earth and heaven. She had seemed to bear Teresa up in those old brown hands until such time as the Child could walk alone. The wisdom of her age had fallen like rain upon Teresa's youth, and been absorbed there, so that it never could be merely youth again. Now, having attained that indefinable something brought by years, Teresa was the better suited to St. John. They were both in middle life now, he through time and she from suffering. And this the little room told her on that first night. She remembered other nights when she had sat by this window, trembling under a girl's mysterious dreams. Now she was different, and in a week she would be another creature still, not her own any longer, but party to that bond which brings both joy and sorrow, life and death. Premonitory pangs were on her, and sweet anticipation. She looked with an untroubled gaze into vistas where wifehood and motherhood lay like sacred groves. There oracles were hid, and gods stood dumb. Yet nothing made her shrink. She had that security which trusts itself to nature and is not afraid.

The next day at five she was in her room again, when Brandon came tapping at the door. Teresa had been planning her shopping out of no money, realizing that she went to her love like a beggar maid, and not caring in the least. She took a droll little pleasure in her poverty and his distress over it. Now while

the house was still, before the others came, she sat and looked at the water in a pleasant dream.

"Ah!" she cried, starting, as Brandon appeared at the open door, "I'm glad to see you. I missed you at the play."

He came in, and stood regarding her for a moment before they sat down. He looked very sad and rather old. Involuntarily she compared his face with St. John's, as it seemed of late, and realized, with a glow, that the man she loved must be happy, to wear so patently the guise of youth.

"It was a beautiful play," she continued, as if she took pride in it.

"Yes," answered Brandon abstractedly, "it had a beautiful effect, owing to Mrs. Warrener. She's a great creature." But he was not thinking about the play. "I came," he said, "to lay my commands on you. I am going to order you to be happy."

Teresa glanced at him with a certain quickening of her face, and he gazed at her sadly, realizing the vibration of life and youth within her. Not that he wanted youth himself. As he turned back to it, he saw himself gamboling like a foolish animal in a playground which looked strangely poor and mean. But he was desolate without the joys that springtime should have earned him.

"I shall be happy," said Teresa under her breath.

"Ah, that's a bad way to begin," commented Brandon. "I hoped you'd learned better than that."

She understood him.

"I have learned better," she said gently. "I don't think about it. Only I am happy now. That's what I mean. And about the rest I don't care."

"Ah, that 's wiser. Don't prophesy. And whatever happens, don't let life down you. That 's what I mean by being happy. You can't control life, but don't let life control you. Harden yourself. Don't get the look of grief. I" — He was about to say, "I have seen it on your face," and pulled himself up, remembering that although this was an unworldly sort of talk, still it might go too far afield. "You see," he said reflectively, "ever since I met you first, I've had a consuming desire to have you comfortable, at least. It keeps growing. It's an awful nuisance. I'm afraid I shan't get over it. I'm afraid it will continue bothering me when I don't see you any more. I don't quite like that. It interferes with my work. It keeps me from reflecting on the end of all things and the Brandon vault."

Teresa looked at him keenly, but he seemed to be entirely impersonal. He made no demands on her. He had no human regrets. Quite indifferently, he was considering a set of emotions which were disturbing to him, and which had something intangible to do with her.

"So you see," he said, "the chances are I shall insist on pottering about your happiness. It will be a kind of mass being said for you while I plod down town and you are getting rheumatism in picture galleries. And when anything happens, when the dress-maker fails you, or you lose a bargain in lace, why, you just remember the mass is going on. Will you?" He looked up at her with his sudden smile which few people ever challenged. It made his face accessible, human, full of love.

She felt a sudden choking of emotion for him, a

great pity for something not understood. But what he said he had said gravely, though whimsically, and she answered it seriously, as in duty bound.

"Yes," she said, "I'll remember."

"There!" answered Brandon heartily. "That's good of you. I shan't give you any wedding present. You don't want to be cluttered with extraneous truck. But I've got a whole shop full of presents waiting for you, all of the fourth dimension. I hope you won't want them here. You shall have them in paradise."

"You'll write more plays!"

"What devil inspires you to say that?"

"Why?"

"Because Greenfield is after me to try my hand at a farce-comedy."

"You will!"

"Not I!"

"Why not?"

"The old story. It is n't in me."

"But Margaret Leigh's play was in you."

"My dear child, that is n't a play. It happened to go because Mrs. Warrener is a wonderful thing, and put a pathos into it that would have melted a brass monkey. But *it* — why it's stiff as the tinsel on a petticoat. It is n't real."

"But I saw it. It must be real. It made me cry."

"Ah well, I can't do anything else. I stole this, I don't mind telling you, out of life. Something gave me vibrations, and my brain partook of them. But I can't do that often. I'm not a sensitive. People wake me, and then I snore again."

"Oh," said Teresa hotly, "if I could lay commands on you as easily as you do on me!"

"Do," said Brandon quickly. "I owe you some fealty. Do!"

"I don't ask you to be happy. I beg of you to work. *Do* something. Oh, if you would!"

"Farce-comedy?" he inquired facetiously, though his eyes had wakened in response to hers.

"Make a million failures, but *do* something."

He got up to go. The door below had opened, and they both heard St. John's step going into his room. That sound cooled the moment between them. He stood over her and looked at her sadly, devotion in his eyes. "This, at least," they said, "I have a right to." "Listen," he went on, "I can't promise to write farce-comedies or poor blank verse. Perhaps even Margaret Leigh could n't quicken another dummy. But I shall keep plodding along. I may step a little quicker because your commands are on me. I don't know. I shall try."

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CHAPTER XLIII

A MUTUAL BOND

AFTER the play, Babine settled for a time into quiet. Not only had Margaret's mind been for weeks on that one issue, but the others had shared more or less in the intensity of her aspiration. Now it was over. The Minervas had made money, and she had roused a local enthusiasm which was likely to be of use to her in more desirable ways. But the next step was not yet apparent. Greenfield had given up his idea of running the play for a week after Easter, and, according to his wont, without explanation. He had the professional temperament to the extent of doing what he pleased, and giving cogent reasons according as he advanced or withdrew. The reasons never meant anything. Doubtless the real motives underneath might have indicated something if he had chosen to define them ; but he never did. He had no hesitation in calling a piece of work "a corker" to-day, and turning the cold shoulder on it to-morrow ; and all the time his steady business sense went on smelling out talent and making plans destined to be rigidly developed after he had once tested their validity. With Margaret he still blew hot and cold ; he would give her an engagement for the autumn and he would not. Evidently, to those who knew his species of calcu-

lation, there was some other fish in the sea, and he was playing them both.

"The amount of it is," said Brandon, "he is signing minor contracts, and keeping an eye on you. In the meantime, if you find a gap in the fence, dodge through, and see how like lightning Greenfield will be after you."

But she could not believe in even half a chance. Her own mercury had dropped, with inaction. Llandaff was better. He was responding to a systematic treatment, and had fallen into a strange quietude unlike his old withdrawals. He did not talk much, but day by day he lay and thought. The nurse had been sent away, and he let Margaret do him little services, accepting them with gratitude. In his own mind, he justified the trouble he was making her by calling it a temporary tribute necessary to fit him for a later independence. One afternoon she came in to him with a letter in her hand. She waved a check triumphantly.

"O Llandaff, see!" she cried. "From the Minervas. Three figures! Does n't it look big?"

"You feel big," said Llandaff, smiling.

"I do! Indeed, I do! At last, I've earned some money, real solid money, and earned it in the way I love."

"You're a lucky woman," said Llandaff drearily, and at once she put her satisfaction out of sight.

Doctor Milbanke's step was at the door. He came in and felt Llandaff's pulse in an old-fashioned way he had.

"What makes you do that?" asked Llandaff, while the doctor shook hands with Margaret.

"What?"

"Feel my pulse in that consequential fashion!"

"Well," said the doctor, smiling, "I do it chiefly because I like to. It's the official laying-on of hands. It makes us both feel better, if only through inherited tradition. And you are better."

Margaret went out of the room, and Llandaff kept his suspicious look upon the doctor.

"Do you mean that?" he asked, "or is it your professional pose?"

Doctor Milbanke sat down, and laid his stick upon his knees.

"You are a very insulting patient at times," he said tolerantly.

"Oh, I know! But grant me some privileges. The condemned man has a right to his valedictory, before the drop falls. Am I better?"

"You know you are," said the doctor, with perfect truth. "You can see for yourself. Your appetite is good, and it's a rare thing for you not to sleep. Your nerves are moderately steady. You have n't had the horrors once in the last ten days. Is that a true bill?"

"I don't mean that," said Llandaff. "I mean" — He pointed to his shoulder, where he still, in imaginative moments, felt the scars.

"They are not increasing," said the doctor quickly.

"Suppose they do increase?"

"Wait till it happens."

They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Llandaff spoke, slowly, as if he were saying something thought out before. He took his handkerchief,

and folded it in careful squares, absorbing himself in the task, and not looking at the other man at all.

"I don't want to know how much of a chance I've got, but I do want to know if the thing is likely to pounce on me suddenly. I'd like to make a fight for life, but I don't want to be — surprised."

"It won't come very suddenly," said the doctor. "And you'd better make the fight."

"In God's name, why did n't you tell me in the beginning?"

"Tell you what?"

"That this was fatal."

"I did n't know. I suspected it was malignant, but I did n't know."

"Is it malignant?"

"Did you ask Marks?"

"No, not in so many words. I was n't ready to hear."

"Are you ready now?"

The doctor looked pitifully at the drawn face, and his heart ached over the needless pangs the man was suffering. For the pain in store for him would not be great. That could be alleviated. He could be led into a coma as dull and blessed as the sleep which ought to follow on a good old age. Doctor Milbanke had seen death too often to fear it for himself or for another. Like that other good physician, his colleague, he would have said, "Death is no great matter, but pain is a very serious matter." And in this case, he meant to govern pain. But he realized that Llandaff, at every point, defeated that beneficent purpose through his own disquiet. His mind was all abroad, his spirit a hunted creature flying from its own de-

sires. He had defied the higher law, and now no law offered him a refuge.

"Are you ready now?" repeated the doctor, and Llandaff asked again. —

"Is it malignant?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "it is."

A poignant silence fell upon the room, and reigned in it. The silence lasted for what seemed to both men a long time. The doctor looked away from Llandaff, to let him bear his pang alone, free even from the intrusion of his sympathy. Finally, his gaze came back, and he regarded the sick man with an extreme pity. Llandaff lay quite still, his eyes fixed on the line of roofs without. A flock of doves came flurrying down, and settled on a patch of grain spilled in the street. A gaunt cat began stalking them, and they rose and settled again in winnowing flight. Their motion drew Llandaff's eyes, and he watched them absorbedly until, within the room, the silence grew unbearable. But when he spoke, the doctor breathed more freely, for his voice was only meditative, tinged with a dull regret.

"I shall leave Margaret nothing," he said.

"You will leave Margaret to me. That is, if I don't step out before you. In any case, I shall see that she's provided for."

"I seem to be going out very small," said Llandaff, "for a fellow who made such a row in the beginning. I cut her off from her profession. By this time she might have been independent of you and me both if — ah well, what's the good of words!"

They went on talking for a long time, however, and when the doctor left, Llandaff took to his room, where

Margaret found him. He had little to say to her, but his manner was pathetically tender. His eyes followed her dumbly. He wished honestly to endow her with some great good before he should go hence and be seen no more. But from that he had cut himself off by his own act. Once he could have left her the memory of an untouched faith. Of that, he had impoverished her.

In the late afternoon some strength always came welling back to him ; and when dinner was over, he called her to his room. She found he had pulled up a chair for her beside his own, facing his in friendly nearness. That was the way they used to sit, in their former intimacy, "near enough to kiss," he often told her ; and her cheek was flooded with the memory. But he did not take her hand, according to old custom, and her pulses settled into their safe dog-trot. He began at once.

"I've made some plans, Margaret."

"That's good. You are certainly better."

"I've had a long talk with the doctor. He made his offer again, and I accepted it. We are going abroad. We sail next week."

Her heart bounded. The pronoun beguiled her with an illusive hope. We ! If she, too, went, it would mean the most wanton abandonment of her prospects ; but she was warm at the possibility of his considering it.

"You two ?" she hesitated.

"Yes, and a man, a sort of valet and nurse combined. The doctor calls that his luxury, but it's more than half for me. Margaret, I am taking it all, and letting him pay for it ; but I swear I do it to give you one more chance."

"I don't want chances," she said under her breath. "I want" — There resolution put a finger on her lips before they could finish, "I want you."

"You do want chances," he broke in roughly, with all the force of his revolt against his own inertia. "You want to wring something out of life, get the better of this hideous world that clutches us by the throat in the end." His hand went to his own throat, as he spoke, and he held it tight, to still the constriction there.

She had never seen him suffer so. The pangs of his withdrawal from the body had been kept from her because he feared her sympathy. Now she saw what his days and nights must be, and she realized that whatever pity she had felt for herself was light indeed compared with what she had for him. The sickness of the spirit was nothing when measured by that of spirit and flesh alike undone. Her eyes took on the look of agony. The blood flew hotly to her cheeks.

"Llandaff," she said, "I cannot have you suffer. I cannot bear it." And immediately her arms were about him, she had drawn his head to her breast, and he leaned there, drawing breaths that hurt and were as merciful as tears. The woman triumphed. She held him there, murmuring tender words which had been frozen as the grave. This was the power of that great passion which gives because it must, and asks for no return. Neither of them knew what she said to him, nor could they ever have known. Only he felt enfolded in a suffusing tenderness that would not be denied, and for the moment he felt comforted. Their cheeks were wet, as they touched presently, and no one knew whose tears these were.

"You shall not suffer," Margaret kept repeating.
"Dear, you shall not suffer."

When they drew apart, after long comforting, she dried his eyes, and then her own, and smiled over the tears. And again she said, in a homespun sort of way, to rob the moment of its tragedy, —

"I can bear anything but your suffering, Llandaff. You must not expect me to bear that."

He lay back in his chair looking with tear-washed eyes at the roofs where his gaze so often dwelt, and where he knew all the harmonious, homely lines. Life seemed warm and good again, because one soul was keenly sorry for him. He craved pity, understanding, with all the appetite left him to crave anything. It seemed to him the forces of nature might well stop and minister to one so weak as he, so sore bestead. His eyes traveled back to Margaret.

"I never can understand you," he said. "I believe you care about me after all."

She had got back all her courage, perhaps from the divine magic of his touch, so long denied her. Her spirit had come to life, her body, too. She feared nothing, least of all her own soul, and its most daring impulses.

"I have never stopped caring for you one instant," she said. "Never for an instant!"

"But I killed your love!"

"You killed out something in me. I don't know what it was. I don't know whether it would come to life again if you called upon it. But there are things you can't kill. If I were dead, and you cried out upon me — No, I won't be extravagant. Only, if you wanted me ever, I should be there." Her face was

white now, with excess of passion, but her eyes were burning. She looked like a creature surmounting all her ordinary emotions: nay, made out of the essence of them. He watched her, fascinated, and knowing that this was something unto which he could not attain. If he were well, life could not be too vivid, — but everything would be different if he were well.

“Margaret,” he said, “I’m not worth all this. There’s nothing in me to answer it.”

“You must answer it.” To his amazement, she spoke as calmly as if he had not seen that flashing warmth in her, a breath before. “I say you must. Not to me, not with a thought of me unless you like, — but you must answer it, by being the man you ought to be. I have bought it of you at such a price” — She stopped, and her face changed, for an instant, into the sharp lines of those who know despair, and who thenceforth bear his mark. Then she went on quietly, as if talking to a child.

“Dear, I have learned such things out of all this! And they all seem to tell the same story. We must be good. We must not think of ourselves. Llandaff, we must be good.” She lifted his hand to her cheek, and he dwelt upon her face with its sweet contention between tears and smiling. The smile touched him, and awoke its shadow on his lips.

“It may be too late, Margaret,” he said simply, “but I will try — to be good.”

She put his hand to her lips, and presently went away to get his supper. It was an exquisite thing not to be afraid of him any more, nor to shrink from that aversion he had felt for her. It seemed likely now that she could minister to him like any other

human being, and, with some arrogance of will rising up in her, she determined upon doing it. He needed to find the world all love. It should be love, if he would let her create a shining planet for him out of her own heart.

CHAPTER XLIV

ESCAPE

LIFE at last seemed very simple to Margaret. She saw the open way before her, and Llandaff himself had cleared it for her feet. He tried pathetically to be good. She noted his persistent gentleness even at times when he was nervously undone; and it wrung her heart, it was so like the patience of a suffering child. He had laid himself under bonds concerning her, and his consideration never flagged. If she could have partaken of all his moods, the bitter, also, she would have been a happy woman, even on this road to death. But he had nothing for her as yet but sweetness and self-control. His soul was still in hiding, though it gave her what it could. She must have had at birth an enormous capacity for happiness: for even such meagre fare made her bloom, in the few days that were left them together. They were to be separated, and he might not return; but they seemed now to be on a road leading to some goal. They had bound their mutual faith, in simple fashion, to do no conscious wrong. The first vows between them were ignored and forgotten. Whatever bond they had assumed was of another sort.

Margaret had an amazing determination in her to get something out of life. She called upon it, and

would be answered. It had become in her eyes a progress, with all souls marching well and ill, but marching to an appointed end. She saw no reason why they should not foot it to the sound of the lyre, and tried herself to walk as if she heard it. One looking at her might have called her happy, though Brandon, who knew her well by this time, never thought her so. He watched her with some fear, seeing in her the exaltation of one whose spirit has conquered its mortal instrument, and trembling for her when the spell should break. But perhaps Margaret was a little happy, after all, because she was near enough her husband now to do things for him, and so feed her aching heart. She was, in a way, admitted to the little intimate joys of feminine work; and she pored over his clothes with an exaggerated care, and that personal love for every thread and fibre which only women know. Everything was in readiness, and the doctor had decided to go to New York a few days before sailing, to give him time for rest. Margaret was to stay at Babine only while her furniture could be packed. Then she was to visit Miss Olivia.

The last day had come, and at ten o'clock Miss Olivia appeared, and found Llandaff up and about, nerved by the excitement of it all.

"I want to say good-by to him," she explained to Margaret. "I thought I would n't even see them off. James said it was n't best."

So she made her little call on Llandaff in the library, and gave him unsolicited promises to take great care of Margaret. "And when I see you again, dear," she said, patting his hand, "you will be well." She allowed herself that subterfuge. For though

she knew there was little chance of his return, she had a childlike hope of another country where we shall all be well. Then she kissed Margaret and took her smiling leave.

One after another, the Republic came in to say good-by, St. John first, very eager and handsome. His belongings, too, had been packed and sent away. His rooms were empty. He shook hands with Warrenner, and wished him luck, and then blundered into the hope of meeting him on the other side. The sick man's face forbade unmeaning civilities, and St. John finished the sentence lamely. But nothing could curb his spirits, for this was his wedding day. He and Teresa were to sail on the "Cynthia" at three.

Margaret followed him into the hall.

"It's rather tough to take you away from your husband, even to see Teresa married," he said, smiling at her. "Do you want to be let off?"

But he spoke out of that egotism of the happy who think the world has ample time to share their jubilation. Margaret, looking at him, smiled back, not in answer to his challenging gladness, but because she saw how old she really was beside him for whom life was at the springtime. St. John was inheriting her earth. He was young.

"No! no!" she said, "I've got to see Teresa married. We meet you at the rectory, do we?"

"Yes, at twelve, please."

"Who gives her away?"

"Doctor Milbanke. I wanted to ask Brandon, but Teresa was n't willing. She said he would n't like it."

"No! he hates ceremonies."

Brandon himself came up the stairs. He looked

very tired, but in a patient sort of way. It was the face nobody has any right to carry in the morning, and Margaret knew that look had come, not from work, but rather some lassitude of the mind. He stopped beside them, greeting St. John with an unwonted warmth.

"Good-by," he said; "good luck to you."

"You won't come round with Mrs. Warrener," urged St. John, "and see her married?"

Brandon shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Things of that sort terrify me. They're like judgment day."

"I hope it will last till then," said the other man irrepressibly, lifting his radiant face to them, as he went down the stairs.

"I hope so, too," called Brandon honestly, "with all my heart, I hope so, too."

Then St. John went out from Babine for good and all, and they heard the door close after him. Margaret and Brandon turned to each other with a smile of common wistfulness.

"The ranks are thinning out," he said.

"Yes," she answered, with her defiant faith, "but we shall all come back."

"Shall we? Well, I hope so — or not. Which ever is easier! St. John does n't think of coming back. He's sure his ticket is bought for fairyland."

"Perhaps it is!"

"Perhaps it is. He's got the princess. Maybe she knows the way. Mrs. Warrener, I'm coming home early, to keep your husband company. Meantime Willie'll be in the house. He'll run down here, and stay until I come."

He went on up the stairs, but not to his own room. Without volition of his own, his feet led him to Teresa. She opened the door to him at once, and he saw, with a curious pain, that even so early she was dressed for her marriage. Her little gray gown was put on with manifest care. Her hair lay smoothly. She had spent a long time in making herself exquisite, with the pains of one who has nothing but cleanliness for her adornment. Her hat and gloves lay together on the table, and her traveling-bag was on the floor. The room was absolutely bare save for the furniture, set in the naked precision worn by lodgings ready to be let.

"Come in," she said. "I was hoping you would come."

"But how sad your room is!" said Brandon involuntarily, as if it gave him pain.

"All my things are gone. My trunk went this morning."

"I'm sorry I came!" Brandon gazed about him with a desolate air. "It seems as if you were gone already."

"Don't look at it. Look at me. I'm here." A friendliest feeling moved her voice. It might, as he remembered it afterwards, have been compassion, or it might have held some hint of that never-recognized bond between them. Somehow they were kindred, though neither could tell how.

"I meant to avoid this room," said Brandon, stepping in and taking the chair she gave him. "I have been selecting the spot in the hall paper to fix my eyes on, as I come up the stairs, to save them from distraction. You need n't think I shall keep on cod-

dling this absurd prejudice in your favor. I shan't. 'Oh, no, we never mention her!' That's my theory." But he looked so miserable while he said it that she could only answer gently, as Margaret had done, —

"We shall all come back."

"Nobody comes back, Child. We make these futile promises, and life forbids us the keeping of them. Come back! I don't want you to come back. I want to hear of you in Paris, cracking the roof of the Opéra with your singing. Then I want to hear of your buying palaces in Wales, — get a bigger one than Patti's, won't you? — and reigning over this whole round earth. Don't you come back. You pitch in and win the great prizes. That's what you do." But even in the saying, he realized it was not in the least what he wanted her to do. He had obeyed, and looked at her when she bade him, and his heart melted with the sweet youth pervading her. Her face bore a deeper flush than that pale cheek had ever known. The eyes had lambent depths. Even her lips seemed to wear the dew of morning. He was consumed now, as at the beginning, with the desire to buy her happiness, immunity from the dusty ways of life. Art in its supremacy is not to be had save at a price, and he shrank from her paying it. If he could have had his will, he would have asked what neither Teresa nor St. John for a moment doubted, — that she would hold the cup of joyance to her lips and drink and drink, and find it ever full.

Teresa could not talk to him. He hurt her heart too much. It made her dumb to look on his uncomplaining sorrow. Presently he rose to go, and then came back again.

"I did n't mean to give you any present," he said, "but I think I shall." He took out his pocketbook, and sought in a compartment until he found something wrapped carefully in paper. She watched him while he did it, and thought how dear he was, how lovable, and through some mystery of fate, how terribly alone. But with some of Margaret's illogical optimism, her spirit brightened within her, and hope sprang up. If he were to be a solitary, it was best for him. The beneficence of the universe seemed inexhaustible, even in the smallest instance. He was walking a dreary path, but all roads led to light. Brandon put away his pocketbook, and opened the little parcel. It held an English sovereign.

"I saved that after my last trip to England," he said. "I was a young man then, and I made sure I should go back. I thought this would be a kind of talisman to keep me in touch with wandering. But I never went back, and now I wouldn't do it for anything. You shall go instead."

Teresa put out her palm.

"And I'm to buy myself a present with it," she answered, half counterfeiting interest, because it might please him. Brandon looked benevolently upon her, like a grandfather, through his spectacles.

"You can buy yourself a present," he said, as we humor a child, "or you can keep it for a pocket-piece, or you can give it away to somebody who wants things and can't get them. Now I'm going. Don't say good-by to me. You just be happy. That's all I ask of you."

He left her without another word, and though she called after him, "I shall keep it for a pocket-piece!

"I shall keep it always!" he did not turn. Later, when he went out again, he walked stealthily past her door, fearing she might open it, and that he should see her face again.

Teresa sat down by the window, and watched the river through her tears. He had not made her unhappy; but he had stirred her heart as human need can stir us, even when our hope is great and we believe that every hunger will be fed. She had nothing to do until the carriage came for her and Margaret, save to sit still and wait the coming of her destiny. Yet every instant was destiny, and having learned that, she feared her vows no more than this rapt interval. And just before twelve, she put on her hat and gloves, and went away with Margaret to be married.

Llandaff sat by his window for a time alone, and was rather glad of solitude. Bebington brought up his luncheon and stayed while he ate it, heartening the poor gentleman, she fondly thought. Then he was by himself again, thinking it all over. This was the end of his disastrous coming to America, the last chance he had much hope in. It had failed. He put aside his professional dreams with a little dull speculation on the curious fact that a man may be born with wild desires and no ability to feed them. In a way, life was over and he had relinquished its dull tools. But a part of life was not over. Something had sprung up in him which he could not define, which was not so much loyalty as the desire of loyalty. And Margaret had given him that. As she told him, she had earned something of him. It had been bought by her blood, and through her agony. He was not

sure whether he loved her or not. Love, as a word, had passed out of his defining, like ambition and the rest. But he felt for her a passion which no other human being had awakened in him. As men are the more constrained to honor through a worthy ancestry, so he felt bound, by her pains, to a desire as great. She had kept her vows to him, and required of him the solvency of his. He would answer that demand. In sheer decency, he would not fail her. It was the simplest form of spiritual consecration, but it was real. He meant, as Margaret put it, to be "good."

Then he heard Laura's step go down the stair. Life awoke in him, the life of the flesh, the unreasoning rage against his destiny. A moment before, he had accepted his stricken state, and resolved to do what he might with it. The sword was broken, but he would go blindly on, the useless hilt in his hand. But now he could have cursed because he was not equipped like other men. Who had broken his sword? The terrible gods? A moment before, their yoke seemed desirable, if not easy. Now he rebelled, and felt his insurrection to be just.

He put his face to the pane to watch her below. She emerged and crossed the street to speak to Willie, coming on the other side. They stood there and talked, and the spring sunshine turned her hair to something more ethereal than gold. She looked buoyantly capable of action. Her gray spring clothes had a bloom on them like frostwork, and the lines of them inclosed her gracefully. Laura was laughing with the Poet, her head serenely poised. At that distance she looked very young, but magnificent, a goddess in her prime. To Llandaff she was all-beautiful, with a

beauty of the senses ; it laid its commands upon him and promised ineffable things because he was so weak. She seemed made up of courage, laughter, and red blood, though really, at first hand, her laugh was all a reminiscent irony. For she had just met Brownell with Olga and a little girl driving, not in the scented carriage, but a cab.

"Claribel !" she had exclaimed, with a swift prophetic instinct. They were on their way to the modest suburban house Brownell had taken. He and Olga looked very serious, as if, Laura thought, they were going on a basket picnic ; and she made no doubt they had embarked on some career of high respectability. Brownell was worn, but not worried, and she made a clever hit in guessing that while the Neatsfoot soap gave a refuge to his powers, he would be a far more tranquil man than he ever had been playing the fool among his betters. "Some day," she thought, "that woman will make him marry her." There, also, she was right, though Brownell accepted the post without persuasion, and was proud and happy over it.

But all this she was not telling Willie. She was only listening while he recounted the wiles by which he had come into his fortune, and his feverish determination to be off at once, the money in his pocket. And as they talked, she turned with the impulse of those who are watched, and saw Llandaff at the window. Involuntarily, she gave him a little nod of recognition, and waved her hand. He drew back, his cheek paler, as if it had been smitten, and she parted with Willie, and went on.

Willie came upstairs at a run, and found Llandaff lying back in his chair, his breath failing him.

"I'm awfully sorry to be late," cried the Poet, full of compunction. "I told Mrs. Warrener you should n't be alone. You're not so well! What can I get you?"

"Nothing," said Llandaff, with difficulty. "Talk to me." If Willie could be started on vain torrents of speech, he might be free to get his hand upon himself again. The Poet obeyed. Practical illness meant very little to him, save that people looked pale and queer. He threw himself down, and fanned his eager face with a magazine.

"I'm going, Warrener," he cried. "I'm really going. Got my money out of the executor! I sail — well, I guess I sail next week. First time I can get a passage cheap enough."

"Where?" asked Llandaff absently. He was still thinking of Laura. Her atmosphere was upon him as potently as if she were at that moment in the room. She suffocated him. He hated her, and yet something within him called and called to her.

"To Venice. That is," added Willie darkly, "if I can slip away without Brandon's heading me off. By Jove, Warrener, where's my pistol?"

"Your pistol? I don't know."

"It's in that drawer of Mrs. Warrener's cabinet. Brandon locked it, and gave her the key. What did she do with the key?"

"She unlocked the drawer again," said Llandaff absently. "She said you might want it when she was n't here. I remember now."

Willie opened the little drawer, and took his plaything out.

"Mind if I load it here?" he asked.

Llandaff shook his head. The Poet ran upstairs for his cartridges, and came down again, eager as a child on Independence Day. As he sat chattering away over his plaything, Llandaff watched him, and wondered bitterly how it would seem to be born like that, all brain, of a certain sort, and no desires which some light bauble could not satisfy. Willie was as absorbed over his weapon as if it were an instrument of war, and ignorantly occupied, too, for Llandaff had to help him load it.

Llandaff had never speculated very much upon the Poet, save as Brandon's gibes brought him into prominence; but now he kept looking at him in sheer envy, and thinking Heaven was kind when it made a thing so easily satisfied, so capable of going crazy over colored draperies or a corner of St. Mark's. The boy seemed to have no part at all in life, but to be capable of getting an endless satisfaction out of it. Destitute of real emotion, he could drink himself drunk on the recital of tragedies at second hand. He and his kind were phantasms, half-developed creatures nourished upon air. They were midges, destined to live a moment and then fade, but not strong enough to move an atom of the created world.

Willie sat mooning on, and Llandaff, letting him talk, answered at appropriate intervals, he knew not what. Laura was still in his mind, in his blood. He had hoped to get off without the sight or mention of her; but she had thrown him the signal of a look, and everything was changed. It might be the coward's part to slip away, but he had not asked for more than that. His heart could not be blameless; but for his deeds, even to the least of them, Mar-

garet should not say that she had agonized in vain. There were moments when he even had a little hope that sometime he might find his way through this weary coil to some free air where Margaret, too, might breathe beside him. For himself he hardly cared, because life appealed to him only on its visible side, and whichever way he looked was failure. But since Margaret had built up some strange fairy world of her own, where hope was ever buoyant and the spirit reigned, he would not deny her any pebble he might place on its foundation stones. As the other woman's breath was upon him, so was Margaret's hand. She held him, she restrained him for ends he did not know; it was for some goal that seemed supremely good to her, and so to him. Suddenly in this haze of feeling, which was hardly thought, a name arrested him.

"Oh," said Willie, "I saw Laura Neale outside! She told me to say she'd come in and see you on her way up."

Llandaff started irrepressibly, and then sank back. The instinct of flight awoke in him so strong and suddenly that he could have thrown himself into the sea, only to escape. But he said nothing. There was a knock at the door. Willie got up, and went to answer it. Llandaff looked from the window, and still he could not speak. His intelligence bade him call after Deane, and tell him to send her away; but his will refused. So he sat, in a dull acquiescence, hopeless and yet conscious that he had not yielded even in thought. Margaret could not blame him, for his soul did not consent. He heard the door close, and Willie came back alone, a letter in his hand.

"By messenger," he said, and gave it to him.

Llandaff laughed drunkenly.

"Is that all?" he asked. "A letter! is that all?" He had escaped, and the sense of it overcame him; it set his heart beating, and his hands to trembling. He tore the letter open, and read at first with scant interest, and then incredulously. It was from Doctor Milbanke. They need not go next day. He wanted to tell Llandaff as soon as possible, to forestall any last preparations. Later, he would come round with Margaret from St. John's wedding, and talk it over. Even Willie's ill-regulated wits were arrested by the sick man's gaze. Llandaff looked at him in a patent horror.

"The 'Chieftain' does n't sail," he said, as if the words were fateful.

"Why?" asked Willie, with the more interest in that he, too, thought of sailing.

"Some devilish thing about the machinery! Doctor Milbanke has engaged passage a week later. A week! a week!"

His resolution had been keyed to fighting it out one half day more. The hours were multiplied interminably. Seven days, and the universe against him!

"Oh, well!" said Willie, "you won't mind. Mrs. Warrener 'll be glad. There's Laura Neale. I'll let her in."

His long legs took him out of the room before Warrener could speak a detaining word. He heard the lower door. She was coming. His sick soul cried aloud within him, but not to God — to Margaret.

"Tell her no! tell her no!" he called harshly, and Laura's laughing voice made answer, —

"Nonsense! I'm coming in."

With the automatic impulse which might have led him into another room, he took up the pistol, and stepped over to the couch. Remembrance came to him that they had spoken of suicide, in that very place, as a poor affair, untidily accomplished. He judged that he might fall easily upon the couch, and that he need not be disfigured. Then he fired. At the instant, Deane and Laura were at the sill, and there Brandon found them, the Poet with his eyes horror-stricken, his teeth chattering, and Laura just turning, to be gone. She looked excited, in a way that was becoming to her.

"Llandaff has killed himself," she said to Brandon, as she passed him, with a tone moved, if it were moved at all, by something like curiosity and wonder.

"Stop!" said Brandon, "stay where you are." He pushed past her to the couch, and took up the dead man's hand. Meantime, Laura was halfway down the stairs. "Where are you going?" called Brandon after her.

She did not answer, but he heard the outer door, and saw her hurrying through the square. He wondered later why he had not guessed her errand; though even to him, who knew her, it seemed incredible. But that afternoon's bulletin, at the "Telephone," had the announcement, "Suicide of Llandaff Warrener, husband of Margaret Leigh," and Greenfield, seeing it, nodded in approval. His leading lady was getting the very best advertising, in the modern way. She should sign her contract when she liked.

CHAPTER XLV

AFTER ALL

BRANDON sent Mrs. Bebington, on the wings of fear, to telephone, and then laid the grip of his mind upon Willie, who could only sit, limp and shuddering, gazing at the pistol lying where it had fallen, near the flaccid hand.

"You had been loading the pistol," said Brandon, over and over, trying to set the boy's wits in order, "and he was fooling with it."

"He taught me to load it," said Willie childishly.

"Yes, he taught you. He took it out of your hand, to do it."

"Yes."

"When the messenger came with the letter, he had it in his hand."

"Yes."

"Off and on, he was fooling with it. Remember."

"Of course!" said Willie, with the vacuity of fear.

"Why should n't I remember?"

Then Brandon saw Margaret and the doctor coming up the street; and cursing his own fate, he went to meet them. Margaret's face was all alight. She had seen the Child married with a simple ceremonial that shook her to the soul, and she had left her standing beside St. John, on the deck of the steamer,

looking so sweet a thing that it seemed as if even life could never have the heart to hurt her. All the dormant pulses of her old spring of love were awake in Margaret. The pain and beauty of being made so keen a pang that she was breathless under it. She felt anew the wonder of this thing called life, and reached forward eagerly to the next fruit it had to offer her, bitter as it might be. Llandaff seemed to be beside her, keeping pace with all her emotions, nearer than ever since their perfect love. She felt as if she had him back again. Then she saw Brandon, and though his face was quite unmoved, at once she knew. At least she was aware that something had happened. She was passing him swiftly, but he stopped her.

"Wait," he said. "One minute! Wait!" His voice died huskily, and he caught his breath. Margaret laid a hand upon his arm, as he stood before her, and for an instant it seemed as if she might struggle with him. But he did not move.

"One minute," he said again. "Your husband" —

"He is dead," said Margaret.

"There was an accident. He was fooling with Deane's pistol."

"He is dead," she said again. "Let me go."

Through this moment of question and quick reply, the doctor was standing there incredulous. He scarcely heard. But looking at Brandon, he learned the hopeless truth.

"Take her round to Olivia," he said rapidly. "Margaret, this is n't the place for you. I'll come for you" —

She glanced at Brandon, and he stood aside.

"Go upstairs," he said to her gently, but following

close behind, to take her hand or hold her, if she needed him. "Go upstairs. You shall be with him. It was n't hard for him. Remember that."

They went into the room together, and Brandon kept pace with her as she walked forward to the couch.

"You see," he said to her, in that voice which comes from love and sorrow mingled, "he has escaped."

Presently she remembered the words, though she was not conscious of them at the time. They were beating through her brain all through the following days and weeks, and her own heart responded to them: "He has escaped." She never forgot them. She never forgot Brandon's tone in saying them. But at the time she felt no more alive than he who was dead beside her, only that they both seemed alive and incredibly near each other. And when the others came, they found her sitting on the floor, quite calm, her head against her husband's breast.

.

One warm October night, that year, Brandon drove home with Margaret after the play. She was living with the Milbankes, but Brandon was her chief companion. The carriage windows were down, and she had told the man, at starting, to drive slowly. The night air was too sweet to lose. She breathed it in as if she tasted it, and thought with pain and longing upon the beauty of the world. She wore that vivid look which always hung upon her after a successful night; it was partly made up of her response to praise, and half the trace of mimic emotion not yet spent. Even in these few weeks of playing, she had changed, as they do

who conquer life in having a fragment, at least, of their desire. Brandon took an eager pride in her. She justified every prophecy he had made about her. She confirmed the value of being, because she kept hope ever before him.

"You're about all there is left in this stony old desert," he said to her to-night, as he had said before. "You're such a cocky party. You insist on life's paying you cash down. If you can't get specie, you take notes. If you ever give up, and say the whole thing's a sell, I shall lie down and die."

"I shan't give up," said Margaret. "I am cocky, if you like, and I'm going to be. And it is n't a sell. It's a system, where you work for pay. If you're not paid, somebody is. That's all I know."

"Have you heard from the Child?" asked Brandon suddenly. It was a question which had hung upon his lips for weeks.

"This very day. I meant to tell you."

"Is she singing?"

"Studying. Getting ready to sing, and enormously encouraged over the prospect of it."

"And happy?"

"Happy! She does n't say so, but the letter tells. It's all 'he' and 'him,' in every line."

"Ah well, it is n't six months yet."

"Never mind if it's only six minutes. She's had it and you can't take it away from her. She sent you a message."

"I'm not sure that I want it." He said it, not ungraciously, but with the sadness of one who, having attained some kind of quietude, wishes to rest in it undisturbed.

"She told me to ask whether you were writing your play."

"I wish you'd let a fellow be, you women," said Brandon fractiously. "Can't I have the privilege of ossifying in peace?"

"But are you writing it?"

"I may have got some kind of a rotten scenario patched together, and that's all the good it'll do. I'll be hanged if I'm going to be set down in a corner, at my time of life, to cut out paper dolls for anybody."

"It's a little stingy," said Margaret speciously, "not to make Teresa as happy as you can. You could double her pleasures by doing good work. Heavens! we're none of us doing it for ourselves. Do you suppose I've gone on one night since I began without Llandaff's name on my lips? He wanted to do things. He never did do them. I'm trying to do them for him. I am going to make my life count now for both of us."

"You never forget him for an instant, do you?" asked Brandon wonderingly.

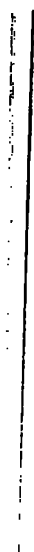
"Never!" Her tone held the passion of life, which is somehow always different from the passion of the stage.

"He is a very lucky fellow," said Brandon, constrained by her faith to use the present form of the verb. To a woman who believed in immortal life, he could do no less.

"He is a little happier, I hope," said Margaret, with ineffable yearning in her voice. It sounded now like that of a child who wanted something very much, and could not have it yet. "Sometime we may be happy together. But if we are not — why, I shall have tried to buy him something, after all."

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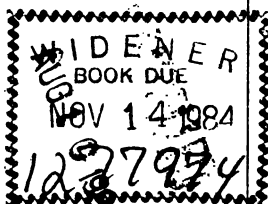
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